

"THE BEGGAR OF SHANTUNG!" NOVEL YARN OF THRILLING SCHOOL-
BOY ADVENTURES IN CHINA!

The **MAGNET**²

EVERY
SATURDAY.



THERE ARE THRILLS IN PLENTY AND LAUGHS GALORE IN-

THE BEGGAR



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Hunted!

SNORE!

Billy Bunter was asleep.

Bunter could sleep anywhere, which was a fortunate thing for Bunter. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry did not find it so easy to close their eyes.

On a mossy patch between two big rocks, on a shadowy hill-side in the Chinese province of Kwang-tung, Billy Bunter slept as soundly as he had been wont to sleep in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School.

With a bullet head pillowed on a fat arm, his eyes shut and his mouth open, William George Bunter slumbered and snored.

Only Bunter's snore broke the silence of the night.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, wakeful, watched and listened. There was little to listen to, save Bunter's nasal solo. But at every moment they feared to hear the footsteps or voices of foes in the night.

They were tired and weary, but they did not care to close their eyes. The danger was too imminent for that.

They lay among the rocks by the winding hill-path, in darkness relieved only by the sparkle of stars in the clear sky overhead.

Where they were the chums of the Remove did not know, save that they were at a great distance from the city of Canton, where they had fallen into the hands of their enemies.

By sheer luck—and pluck—they had escaped from the hands of Chong Lo and his gang of coolies, on the way to the inland city of Pan-shan, where the Mandarin Tang Wang and an unknown fate awaited them.

But up and down the winding path in the rocks the yellow men were hunting them; twice, in the silence, they had heard distant calling from one panting Chink to another.

They rested and listened. Billy Bunter's snore went on with a steady murmur.

Bob Cherry stared curiously in the dim starlight at the sleeping Owl of the Remove. Bunter, assuredly, was not the bravest of the three Greyfriars juniors lost in the hills of Kwang-tung. Yet he slept soundly, while anxiety kept his companions wide awake.

"Blessed if I know how he can do it!" murmured Bob, breaking a long silence. "Anybody would think we were safe in the dorm at Greyfriars, to hear him! What an unearthly row!"

Wharton smiled faintly.

ONE MAN v. AN ARMY!

Oriental cunning and terrorism 'gainst a single Britisher's pluck and resource.

"There's nothing to eat, so naturally he's gone to sleep!" he remarked.

Bob chuckled.

"I say, old bean, we're in some scrape," he said.

"Better than when we were in the hands of that blighter Chong and his gang, old chap."

"That's so! We'd still be prisoners if that bunch of bandits hadn't jumped on Chong & Co. But—"

"If we keep clear of them, we've a chance of getting back to Canton," said Harry. "It can't be more than thirty miles."

"There's a sporting chance, anyhow."

The juniors were silent again. They were at liberty, and that was something; and there seemed a chance of dodging the Chinese who were hunting them, for more than an hour had passed since they had heard any sound from

their pursuers. But getting back to Canton, where they had left their chums and Ferrers Locke, was another matter. Three "foreign devils," wandering in unknown China, far from all beaten tracks, were not likely to find the way easy.

Ferrers Locke, no doubt, would be seeking them. But seeking three fellows who had vanished into the interior of mysterious China was rather like seeking three small needles in a particularly large haystack.

But while there was life there was hope, and neither Wharton nor Bob Cherry were likely to give in while there was a shot in the locker.

Stretched on the hard earth, their shoulders resting against hard rock, they rested, though they could not sleep. They were hungry; but there was no food; and they tried not to think of it. Bunter was fortunately able to forget hunger in sleep. The other two grinned and bore it—or, at least, bore it, if they could not grin.

Wharton made a sudden movement.

"Listen!" he breathed.

There was a sound in the hill-path that wound by only a few yards from their nest among the rocks and boulders.

Bob shut his teeth hard.

"They're coming!"

Snore!

Faintly came footsteps through the still night. Chong Lo and his men had gone far in the pursuit of the escaping juniors, never guessing that they had passed them on the way. Now they were coming back up the hill-path.

Wharton's hand glided over Bunter's open mouth, and he shook the fat junior lightly. The men on the path were still far; but when they came nearer there was no doubt that they would hear Bunter's hefty snore. There was at least five of them—brawny Chinese coolies. The juniors had no chance in a struggle.

A light shake was no use to Bunter when he was asleep. He snored on regardless.

Wharton shook him again and again. Bunter's eyes opened at last behind his spectacles, and only Wharton's hand over his mouth stopped a loud exclamation.

"Quiet!" whispered Harry.

"Groogh!"

"Not a sound!"

Wharton withdrew his hand, and

OF SHANTUNG!

BY
FRANK RICHARDS

Bunter sat up, blinking at him through his spectacles, morosely.

"Anything to eat?" he asked.

"No, ass."

"Then wharrer you wake me for, you silly idiot?"

"Quiet! Those rotters are coming back—up the path! If we make a sound they'll be on to us!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Shut up, you ass!" breathed Bob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Quiet!"

"You needn't have woke me, you silly shump! I suppose I was quiet enough asleep!" grumbled Bunter. "Wharrer you wake me for? I was dreaming—"

"Be quiet!"

"I was dreaming of that lovely spread old Wun stood us the day we got to Canton. Do you remember?"

"Will you shut up?" hissed Bob Cherry.

Bunter was about to snort; but the sound of a loose stone clinking on the steep path checked the snort. The stone had rolled under the foot of a Chink, and it told that the enemy was near at hand. A shiver ran through the fat limbs of the Owl of the Remove.

"Oh dear! Suppose they find us here?" he gasped.

"They'll find us for a ded cert if you don't keep your idiotic mouth shut!" hissed Bob.

"Oh lor!"

Bunter clamped his mouth shut. It was not easy for William George Bunter to keep his mouth shut, asleep or awake; but he did it now. The sound of feet on the hill-path caused his fat heart to palpitate with terror.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer. Muttering voices could be heard now, and the juniors recognised the snarling tones of Chong, the scarred coolie. His tone told of his savage rage at the failure of the pursuit.

Closer and closer came the footfalls on the steep path, till the bunch of coolies were abreast of the spot where the juniors lay as still as mice among the piled rocks of the hill-side.

Wharton peered through a crack among the boulders, and sighted the Chinese—scarce ten feet away. They were moving slowly; staring from side to side among the rocks and brambles by the path. But he saw only three. Chong Lo had apparently left two of the coolies lower down the hill watching the path.

In a glimmer of starlight he saw the fierce, enraged face, with the sword-out across it, of Chong Lo. The slanting eyes were burning. Chong carried one arm in a sling; in his other hand a knife was gripped. To and fro he glared as he came up the steep hill-path, evidently aware by this time that the fugitives must have dodged away from the path and taken cover. But to search among the rugged rocks in the darkness was hopeless; there were a hundred hidden nooks, and until



morning came Chong had little chance of finding the "foreign devils" he sought.

But a sound would have drawn him upon them, and they stilled their breathing. In the silence it seemed to the juniors that they could hear the beating of their own hearts; it seemed to them that the keen-eyed Chinks must hear.

But Chong heard nothing, and the three yellow men passed on up the winding path into the gorge where the fight with the Chinese bandits had taken place. They disappeared, and all was silent again.

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"They're gone!"

"What about making a break?" muttered Bob.

"There's two of them left below watching the path. No doubt about that. They know we're not far away. If we follow the path down the hill we walk into their hands."

"If we wait here till morning they've got us."

"I know! We've got to clear, but we can't follow the path; we've got to give it a wide berth."

Bob Cherry stared round in the gloom, broken by the glimmer of starlight. Wild and rugged hillside surrounded the juniors—rough, shaggy, trackless. It was likely to be rough going if they kept away from the hill-path cut in the steep ascent, barred with steps of granite slabs. But any chance was better than the certainty of falling into the hands of the enemy.

He rose and stretched himself.

"Better get going," he said.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Get up, Bunter!"

"I'm tired."

"Get up, you fat duffer!"

"I'm hungry."

"Fathead! We've got to get a move on while those Chinks are at a distance. If they should hear us—"

Billy Bunter groaned and dragged himself to his feet.

"Keep your pecker up, old fat bean," said Bob Cherry encouragingly. "We'll get somewhere—some time! Never say die!"

"Oh dear!"

And they started, picking their way among rough rocks and clinging brambles, blind to what might lie before them, but satisfied that every step was taking them, at least, farther and farther away from the enemies who were hunting them.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Man with the Begging-Bowl!

FRANK NUGENT stared from the window of the ko-tang in the house of Wun Chung Lung, at Canton, into the wide gardens glimmering under sparkling stars. His face was white and set, his hands clenched.

Coloured lanterns lighted the hall, dusky in its corners, and gleamed on the many hues of precious jars, from which crammed rose-leaves distilled a sweet, lingering scent.

Johnny Bull was moving to and fro restlessly. Hurree Jameet Ram Singh leaned on the window near Frank, his dusky face troubled. Little Wun Lung, the Chinese junior of Greyfriars, sat on a low stool—silent, motionless, his ivory face expressing little or nothing. But the others understood that their Chinese chum was feeling very keenly the disaster that had overtaken his friends.

None of the juniors was speaking. They had discussed the matter again and again, but discussion was futile. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry and Bunter had fallen into the hands of the agents of Tang Wang; they had been stolen away from Canton, and vanished into the mysterious interior of China. No fellow there would have hesitated to risk his life or to give his life to rescue them—and they were powerless.

All their hope of seeing their friends again centred in Ferrers Locke. Yet what could even the celebrated Baker Street detective do?

By that time they knew the three prisoners were far away—probably across the hills that lay to the west,

for there was little doubt that they were being taken to Pan-shan, the city where the Mandarin Tang Wang was all-powerful.

Pursuit—even had there been force available for it—was hopeless, or seemed so; for there were a dozen routes to the west, and Chong might have taken any one of them.

Yet to remain idle in Canton while their friends were carried farther and farther away from them was bitter and galling; it was too bitter to be endured. And Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh felt that they could not stick it out for long. If it meant death to follow the way their friends had gone, still they had to follow. The attempt might be insanity, but it was better than waiting in idleness while their chums were cruelly done to death. And it was only their respect for Ferrers Locke—their faith in him—that still held the three juniors in the house of Wun.

Locke had some plan, though they did not know what it was. They wondered what it was without being able to guess.

Frank Nugent turned from the window at last; his hands were clenched hard.

"I can't stand this, you chaps!" he said in a low, husky voice. "We can't stick here and wait—we can't!"

"Just what I was thinking," said Johnny Bull. "Sink or swim together."

"The esteemed Locke has told us to wait, my absurd chums," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What's the good?" muttered Nugent.

"Follows Locke plenty clever Johnny," murmured Wun Lung. "P'laps he beatee Tang Wang allee light."

"Locke's up against it now!" said Frank. "What can he do? Tang Wang's as safe at Pan-shan as the Emperor of China used to be at Peking. It would need an army to root the brute out and get our friends out of his clutches."

"P'laps askee lansom!" said Wun Lung.

It was a faint hope—that the prisoners were to be held to ransom.

"Fathee payee lansom, s'possee askee," said the Chinese junior. "Mo tink—me plenty sure—fathee payee lansom."

His friends did not feel so sure of that.

It was Mr. Wun's refusal of the demands of the Red Dragon tong that had made Tang Wang, the chief of the teng, his enemy.

The death of Wun Lung had been ordered as a warning to his father, and Ferrers Locke and the Famous Five had brought the Chinese boy safe home to his father's house, where he was secure from the mandarin.

Mr. Wun, with the tenacious obstinacy of a Chinese, had refused to pay ransom when his son's life was threatened. The juniors did not feel at all sure that he would part with an enormous sum for the sake of his son's friends.

Neither, if Mr. Wun was willing, would it be possible to trust to the good faith of the mandarin.

They knew something of Tang Wang; and they knew how likely it was that, even if the ransom was paid, all that would be received in return for it would be the heads of the prisoners in a basket.

Nugent shook his head dismally.

"That man is a fiend," he said. "And his son was killed when they attacked us in the Red Sea coming over
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here. He's not likely to forget that now that he has our friends in his power."

Wun Lung was silent.

The mandarin was greedy for money to fill his war-chest to carry out his ambitious schemes. Tang Wang, descendant of the Ming princes who had ruled China before the Manchus came, dreamed of restoring the ancient dynasty in his own person. With the country divided against itself, three or four contending armies invading and ravaging, the cunning mandarin was fishing in troubled waters. He was head of a powerful tong; he was allied with a war-lord powerful in Kwang-si, where his city lay; but he needed money—more and more money. Yet it was likely that the death of his son, Tang Lao, had turned his thoughts rather to vengeance than to gain.

The juniors remembered the cold hate in his look when they had seen him in the street in Canton.

Likely enough he would talk of ransom; would extract all he could. But they felt, with a shudder, that he never would unloose his grasp on his victims. He would take all that he could take; but when there was no more, the lives of the captured juniors would pay for the life of Tang Lao. At the most, time would be gained.

Nugent clenched his hands convulsively.

"I can't stand it!" he repeated. "I'm not going to stick here safe, while Harry—"

He broke off, as there was a footstep in the ko-tang. Mr. Wun, in his loose-flowing Chinese garments, came in by one of the many doors. With him came a strange figure, amazing to the eyes of the juniors in that well-appointed place.

It was a Chinaman of about sixty, apparently, in a tattered faded blue robe, with bare feet. His face was yellow, wrinkled, the chin half-hidden by a ragged beard. The tattered gown was dirty, the face was dirty, and in a dirty hand he carried a wooden bowl.

The juniors had seen many such figures in and around Canton. Beggars were not few in the city. But what that dirty, tattered beggar could be doing in the palatial home of Mr. Wun was a mystery.

The beggar-man looked at the juniors, and came towards them. He held out the begging-bowl, and spoke in Chinese. Mr. Wun stood and watched him, with a strange expression on his face.

"We don't understand you," said Johnny Bull. "We can't speak Chinese. What does he want, Wun Lung?"

Before the Chinese junior could answer the beggar spoke in English:

"O venerable lord, born many centuries before me, grant a trifle to Hung, the son of Shing, who has travelled by far ways even from the Great Wall of China, to crawl at the feet of the generous-hearted people of Kwang-tung."

"Oh, is that it?" said Nugent, and he felt in his pocket for a silver dollar, amazed as he was by Mr. Wun allowing the tattered beggar to ply his trade in the ko-tang of the great house.

But the begging-bowl was withdrawn the next moment.

"I think this will do!" said the Chinese beggar, in quite a different voice. "Obviously you do not recognise me."

The Greyfriars fellows jumped almost clear of the mosaic floor.

"Ferrers Locke!" gasped Nugent.

"Great Scott!"

They gazed at the beggar in blank wonder. His voice told them who he

was. But even when they knew that it was Ferrers Locke standing before them in the guise of a Chinese beggar, they could not recognise him. In that wrinkled, yellow mask of a face there was not the remotest resemblance to the clear-cut features of the Baker Street detective.

"Mr. Locke!" repeated Nugent blankly.

Locke nodded.

"I was giving my disguise a final test," he said, in his natural voice. "You did not know me, and I do not think that our friend Tang Wang will be any wiser."

"Oh!" gasped Johnny Bull. "You're going—"

"I am going to Pan-shan," said Ferrers Locke quietly. "I shall lose no time, and I shall probably reach the city as soon as the prisoners. No white man can enter Pan-shan while Tang Wang governs the city, without being cut to pieces. But a Chinese beggar-man may have better luck."

"And—and you think—"

"I hope!" said Locke quietly.

With a nod to the juniors he passed out of the ko-tang with Mr. Wun, to be conducted away by a secret door from the gardens. The juniors were left in silence. There was hope in their hearts now; but it was hope mingled with doubt and dread. For well they knew that in going to the city of the mandarin, in far-away Kwang-si, the Baker Street detective was going into deadly peril—into the very jaws of the tiger.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Lost in China!

"O H dear!"

"Keep on!"

"Beast!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Ow-w-w-w!"

Billy Bunter groaned deeply, as he trailed heavily along. There was no doubt that the Owl of the Remove was tired and sleepy, and very, very hungry. And when Billy Bunter suffered he was not the fellow to leave the world in ignorance of the fact.

How many miles they had tramped over the rough hills the three juniors did not know. The going was hard, the darkness like a cloak, in spite of the brightness of the stars. All around them was silent, dark, desolate, and it was impossible to guess in which direction they were going—north, south, east, or west. Several times, barren as the hills seemed, they had come upon patches of cultivation—little fields terraced out of the hillside. Once a savage dog had barked at them, and had been driven off with stones. But of any human inhabitant they saw no sign.

Wharton and Bob Cherry were bone-weary; but they helped Bunter between them. Dawn—the early dawn of Kwang-tung—was not far away, and they were anxious to put as great a distance as possible between themselves and Chong Lo before daylight came. For that Chong would hunt them with the deadly persistence of a tiger, they had no doubt. It might cost him his head to report to Tang Wang that they had escaped. More likely than not it was a matter of life or death with the scarred coolie.

Many miles, at least, they had covered, they were sure of that. So far as they could, they had followed a descending direction, hoping to get back to the plains. But they were still in the tangled hills, when Billy Bunter, with a deep groan, sank down on a rock and refused to take another step.



Far away in the east, the direction of Canton and Hong Kong and the China Sea, was a pale glimmer, heralding the dawn.

Day was near.

"I say, you fellows," moaned Bunter, "it's all up! I can't go on! Leave a fellow alone."

"Another mile——"

"Why not say another million miles?" asked Bunter with anguished sarcasm. "I've walked my legs off. We've done about twenty miles already."

"Not more than two or three, I think."

"Rot!"

"Look here, old chap——"

"Oh, shut up, and let a fellow rest!"

"Do you want us to go on without you?" demanded Bob Cherry.

But even that failed to move Bunter. He slid down to the foot of the rock and stretched out his fat limbs.

"Do!" he said bitterly. "It would be like you! Desert me, after all I've done for you! Just your sort!"

"You benighted ass!"

"Beast!"

Wharton and Bob exchanged hopeless looks. They were worn down with fatigue and want of sleep, but they were still capable of further efforts. Bunter, no doubt, could have made another effort; but he had made up his fat mind that he wasn't going to. He pillowed his head on his arm, and closed his eyes behind his spectacles.

"Look here, Bunter——" said Harry at last.

Snore!

"You frabjous owl!"

Snore!

Billy Bunter was fast asleep.

"Oh crumbs!" said Bob Cherry.

"Well, we can't carry him, and I suppose we can't roll him down the hill like a barrel. After all, I don't think I could have done more than another mile. Let's take a rest."

"Nothing else for it," agreed Harry.

A rest was welcome enough to the two weary juniors, though they would have been glad to put a greater distance between themselves and the Chinks. They sat down, leaning on rough rock, and closed their eyes. Until daylight came they were hidden from sight unless a searcher should actually stumble on them, and they ached for sleep. In less than a minute they were sleeping as soundly as Billy Bunter.

Dawn came from the east in a rosy glow. The shadows rolled away as the sun climbed higher in a blue sky. It was the warmth on his face that awakened Harry Wharton at last, and he sat up and rubbed his eyes rather dizzily.

"Oh, my hat!" he ejaculated.

The sun was high now in a cloudless sky—the sunny sky of Kwang-tung. Evidently it was long past dawn.

Wharton rose to his feet and looked about him. Bob Cherry awoke at his movement and rose, too. Bunter snored on.

"Looks jolly!" said Bob.

Below them were the rugged slopes of the hillside, terraced here and there in fields cultivated to the very edge of

Hidden by the wistaria on the wall, Wharton watched the wild-looking crew. Among them was a man of gigantic stature, and Harry recognised him as the chief of the Chinese bandits!

possibility, irrigated by little ditches. They were in a land where water was precious, and not a drop was wasted. Below was a valley extending to a distant plain rich with paddy-fields. Glimmering in the sun, a river traversed the plain, and on the shining water, tiny in the distance, they could see boats, with men in them in enormous Chinese hats.

Nearer than the river was what looked like a collection of small, flat houses—a Chinese village. Figures like ants moved in the sunshine. Still nearer was a strange-looking building—a pagoda of many roofs, rising one above another, each roof of painted tiles with curled-up edges. And half-way to the pagoda was another smaller building, standing solitary on the edge of a trodden track that wound down from the hills. It was a tumbledown-looking place, with red walls and roof, and seemed deserted. Close by it was a small cultivated field.

Bob Cherry grinned.

"It seemed like a giddy desert in the dark," he remarked. "But there's plenty of people about. My hat, I'm hungry!"

"No sign of the enemy," said Harry.

"Thank goodness, no!"

They scanned the hillside, round and about, above and below. How far they were from the pass through the hills where they had parted from their captors they could not tell. But they knew it must be a good distance; they

could see nothing of the high gorge where the fight with the Chinese bandits had taken place. And nowhere was a sign of the scarred coolie and his crew in search of them.

"We've got clear of that gang," said Harry. "Now we've got to get back to Canton somehow."

"That's the programme," said Bob. "The fellows must be frightfully anxious about us; Mr. Locke, too."

Wharton pointed to the distant shining river.

"That may be the Che-kiang, for all we know," he said, "or perhaps the West River. Anyhow, it's fairly certain that it flows down to Canton. That's the way back, Bob, if we can work it."

"Good egg! I suppose every river in this locality flows down to Hong Kong," said Bob. "That's the way home, and we'll scrounge a boat somehow. The country looks peaceful enough, and I don't see why we should have trouble with the natives. Of course, they don't like foreign devils. But we don't look very devilish."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter yawned deeply. "I say, got anything to eat?"

"No, ass!"

"Well, I think you might have looked for something to eat, as you're up first!" grumbled Bunter. "I'm famished!"

"Do you think we're not hungry, fathead?"

"Just like you fellows to be thinking all about yourselves! Can't you ever think of anybody else?" asked Bunter.

"Of all the beastly selfishness—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Yah!"

Bunter jerked himself to his feet.

He was prepared to go on sleeping—but for the urgings of the inner Bunter. Bunter had a feeling as if he had not eaten for weeks. At the present moment he could have eaten and relished the snails and frogs he had disdained in the house of Mr. Wun.

He blinked round him in the sunshine through his big spectacles.

"Well, where are we going to get any grub?" he asked.

"Echo answers where?" said Bob.

"If you fellows think you're going to starve me—"

"Oh, cheese it!"

Bunter snorted indignantly. Wharton and Bob, watching the valley below them, consulted. The first necessity was to get food; the second, to find their way back to Canton. Neither seemed easy. They would have preferred, had it been possible, to steal quietly through the countryside unseen by the inhabitants, but that evidently was impossible. As soon as they came down from the hills—indeed, before—they would be under many eyes. But they were aware that Chinese peasants were an extremely peaceable race, except when excited by anti-foreign feeling, and they hoped, at least, to meet with no hostility.

From where they stood they could pick out a path that led down into the valley, and after a few minutes' discussion they decided to follow it and chance their luck. There was, in fact, nothing else to be done unless they were to famish on the barren hillside.

"We'll stop at that lonely house first," said Harry, with a gesture towards the red building isolated from all others. "We may get food there; and, anyhow, we can test what the inhabitants are like. So long as we keep

clear of Chong & Co. I don't see why anybody else should cut up rusty."

Wharton still had the Chinese knife that had belonged to Chong Lo, and as a precaution they cut two stout cudgels from a thicket. Then the knife was hidden from sight, and with the cudgels in their hands they started. Billy Bunter rolled after them.

Near as the little red building looked in the clear air, it was a good distance down into the valley. They followed the path, and as they descended the cultivation grew thicker about them, and they sighted several huge-hatted Chinese peasants in the fields, hard at work. The Chinese peasant is probably the hardest worker in the world. In a country teeming with an immense population, millions of them always on the very edge of subsistence, there is little room for loafing or slacking. In China, as in most countries, the hardest labour falls on the men who till the land; in the East, as in the West, it is the most useful labour that is hardest and least rewarded.

"Foreign devils" in that purely Chinese locality must have been an uncommon sight, yet many of the workers in the little fields did not trouble to raise their heads as the juniors passed by. Some looked at them, some stared hard; two or three gave them evil looks; from a few they had mocking and derisive glances, such as a Chinaman might have received in an English countryside. But no one offered to approach or interfere with them, and that was a great relief.

They reached the little red building at last. Deserted as it looked, the field beside it was cultivated, and there were many footprints outside the gate, so they concluded that it was inhabited. There was a crazy gate, at which Wharton knocked with his cudgel.

"I say, you fellows, what's the good of this place?" grumbled Billy Bunter. "It's not an inn, is it?"

"Precious few inns in China," said Harry. "It looks to me some sort of a temple."

"What the thump is the good of a temple?"

"Travellers put up in temples in China, fathead!"

"Oh, my hat! Fancy a traveller trying to put up at a church in England!" gurgled Bunter.

"It's different here, ass!"

"Well, I don't care what it is so long as they've got some grub," said Bunter. "For goodness' sake, bang again, and make the beasts hear!"

Knock! Knock! Knock!

There was no answer to the knocking, but the juniors could hear someone moving within the gate.

Knock! Knock!

A thin, querulous voice came from within the gate. As it spoke in Chinese, the juniors had not the remotest idea of what the speaker was saying. Apparently, however, he was asking what they wanted, or what they were.

"Better try him in English," said Bob. "He may understand—lots of Chinese do in Canton, anyhow."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Please, let us in!" he said to the unseen men behind the gate. "We have lost our way, and are hungry. We can pay well for food."

He heard a startled exclamation. In that remote quarter of Kwang-tung, an English voice was as startling as a Chinese voice would have been in some village of Warwickshire or Northumberland.

"Can you speak English?" went on Wharton.

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Evidently the unseen man could speak English, for the answer came in that language.

"Is it a foreign devil who knocks at the gate of Tin Bong?"

It was a thin, high-pitched voice—the voice of age. The juniors could guess that Tin Bong was some priest, such as are found in little, lonely, tumbledown temples all over China, subsisting chiefly on the alms of the devout or the charitable.

"We are English!" said Harry.

"Go your way, foreign devil!"

"We can pay for food—pay well!"

There was a pause.

Then a bar was removed, and the crazy gate swung open on its uncertain hinges.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

In the Temple of Buddha!

TIN BONG stood in the gateway, staring suspiciously at the three "foreign devils" standing without.

He was an elderly man, thin and bony, dressed in a shabby gown of blue edged with black, and ragged shoes. His yellow face was wrinkled, and his eyes, narrow and slanting, gleamed under bushy brows. His look was suspicious, furtive, hostile; it struck the juniors that they had never seen a more unpleasant face. There was greed in the prominent black eyes under the bushy brows, and it was undoubtedly the word "pay" that had excited the man to open the gate.

The suspicious, hostile look faded from his hard, sharp face as he scanned the schoolboys.

Muddy and dusty and travel-stained as they were, Mr. Tin Bong probably discerned that they were likely to have money about them.

He did not, however, immediately ask them to enter. No Chinese ever comes immediately to the point.

"Whence do you travel, honourable ones?" he asked.

"We have come down from the hill," said Harry. "We've lost our way, and need rest and food."

"Where do you go?"

"We are going back to Canton—Kwang-tung," added Harry, giving the city its Chinese name, which is the same as that of the province of which it is the capital.

"You are far from the city now, estimable one!" said Tin Bong.

"Yes; we have lost our way." Wharton had no intention of telling this evil-looking man that they were escaping from enemies.

"I have little food to offer!" said the recluse. "But you may enter and rest, if it please your honourable greatness."

He stopped aside, and the juniors entered the little courtyard. Before them was the open doorway of the red building.

Tin Bong made them a gesture to pass in, and they went into the building. They were glad to see the gate closed behind them. If Chong and his gang came that way, they were out of sight now.

They found themselves in a bare, dismal room, furnished by little more than a couple of crazy benches and a chest. At the farther end was a curtained shrine, doubtless that of some god—though whether this man was Buddhist or Taoist or any other kind of "ist," they did not know.

"I have little," repeated Tin Bong. "Since war came on the land, the offerings are few. It is not many moons

since the soldiers were here burning and pillaging. And what the soldiers leave in a country is taken by the robbers."

Wharton looked at him curiously.

"You speak very good English, sir!" he said.

Tin Bong smiled, a smile that was more like a sneer.

"I lived many years with a top-side white joss-man," he answered. "For him I interpreted to the people."

The juniors were aware that missionaries were called "joss" men by the Chinese; the native idols being "josses."

GREYFRIARS CORRESPONDENTS

No. 15.

Although our clever Greyfriars rhymester sympathises at the present moment with the unfortunate Wun Lung, he cannot refrain from his usual leg-pull... which he trusts will meet with your approval.

I TAKE the pen and the ink
To write to you, Cousin Ching;
I scratch my head and tinkle
How I can explain everything.
I want to unfold the story
How little Wun Lung did aspire
To cover himself with much glory,
And make all Greyfriars admire.

To make my schoolfellows happy
I give them a wonderful feast,
Invites Bob Cherry (good chap!)
And fat Billy Bunter (a beast!)
And Wharton and Nugent and Toddy,
And Inky and Browney and Bull;
I'd like to ask everybody,
But study already check-full!

You know how we cook in China,
What savoury dishes we make;
They tempt the palate far finer
Than plain English chops or steak.
So little Wun Lung set to work
And makes a wonderful pie;
Far nicer than chicken or turkey,
Or piggy that English folk fry!

"You were interpreter to an English missionary?" exclaimed Harry.

"That is the truth, born-before-me."

"Where is he now?"

"The soldiers cut him into very small pieces, which they threw into the Che-kiang," answered Tin Bong.

The juniors shuddered.

"Why?" asked Bob, in a low voice.

"He caused thunderstorms, and bad crops, by his incantations," explained Tin Bong.

"Good heavens!"

It was scarcely possible to believe that the man was speaking seriously. Yet it was evident that Tin Bong was perfectly serious.

"Many times the people would have killed him, but they dared not, before there was war," explained Tin Bong.

"But when the soldiers came, they killed him. And the people rejoiced."

The juniors were silent. Tin Bong made a gesture towards a bench, and they sat down.

He began to prepare a meal of vegetables and boiled millet. It was not appetising, but it was very welcome to the three hungry schoolboys. He gave them the food in earthen bowls, with chopsticks to eat it with. Billy Bunter tucked in industriously. He would have liked something more savoury; but anything of an edible nature was welcome to Billy Bunter. He emptied his bowl and asked for more.



I serve the pie, with a flourish,
And say to my guests, "Tuck in!
You need a feedee to nourish,
Or else you become velly thin!"
Fat Bunter, he say, "This is ripping!"
He passes his platee for more;
And then I see Bob Cherry slipping,
With face all white, to the floor!

"Oh dear! Oh, the anguish!" he groans.
"I'm poisoned, you heathen Chinee!"
Then Bunter, he gives a deep moan,
And crawl to the nearest settin.
Then Toddy leaps up, looking Hunnish,
And shakes his fistee at me,
And threaten to panches and punish,
So little Wun Lung forced to flee!

My guests stagger off to the sanny,
Complains of painee that kill;
The waitron, a charming old granny,
Produces a powerful pill.
And when they return, black as thunder,
They smite Wun Lung hip and thigh;
And leave him, dear cousin, to wonder
Why English no likes RAT PIE!

The priest—if he was priest—watched them in grim silence. His shiny, furtive eyes never left them.

They were glad of the man's hospitality, such as it was; but they could not help feeling uneasy in his presence; and they were glad that they had not mentioned that they were fleeing from enemies. He looked as if he was quite capable of betraying them for a few copper cash.

He was, however, providing for them as well as he could. It was plain that he was poor—the place ached with poverty.

He grunted as Bunter held out his bowl for more; but he refilled the bowl, and the fat junior tucked in again.

"I am poor," said Tin Bong, after a

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long silence. "The honourable ones will observe that I am very poor. This is but a small shrine, and the offerings are few. But I am well aware that all foreigners are rich, and you will leave something that will cause me to remember you with gratitude."

"Certainly," said Harry.

He took from his pocket two silver dollars, and handed them to the Chinaman.

It was not a large sum, but he was startled by the blaze that leaped into Tin Bong's eyes at sight of the silver.

It dawned upon him that the man seldom saw silver, copper cash being probably all that he ever received. And a single silver dollar was worth innumerable copper cash.

Tin Bong's manner became more respectful—indeed, almost reverential. He kow-towed to the earthen floor.

"O estimable and harmonious one, born many years before me," he said, "it was by the special will of Kwen that you were guided to my door. Lay your commands upon this poor worm."

Wharton smiled.

For a second he had been almost alarmed by the greed that blazed in Tin Bong's eyes at sight of the money. But the man was now all respect and reverence; and it occurred to Wharton that he might be useful in obtaining the means to return to Canton. A few silver dollars would be a cheap price to pay for a safe return to Ferrers Locke and the rest of the party.

"We want to get back to the city as soon as possible," he said. "Can we hire a boat on the river to take us there?"

"I have a brother who is a boatman on the river, born-before-me," answered Tin Bong. "He will take you to Canton for five silver dollars."

The juniors brightened up wonderfully.

"Oh, good!" said Billy Bunter.

"Fine!" said Bob.

"Done!" said Harry Wharton. "And the sooner the better. Our friends there will be anxious about us."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Don't bother, Bunter."

"Look here, I want a rest before we start," argued Bunter, "that river's miles away. I'm tired!"

"Fathead!"

"Let the honourable ones rest in my poor house, while I seek my brother and tell him that his boat is needed," said Tin Bong. "When I return I will bring a rickshaw, in which you may go down to the river unseen by the people. For these people are not civilised like me, and they do not love foreign devils."

Wharton and Bob Cherry exchanged glances of satisfaction. Billy Bunter was still guzzling.

"We dropped into the right shop this time, old man," said Bob. "Go ahead, Mr. Tin Bong, and we'll wait here."

Tin Bong kow-towed again.

"Let the estimable ones rest," he said.

"This poor hovel is not worthy of their greatness; but it is safe from the robbers; and if any should knock at the gate, make no answer. And with great speed I will return and take you to my brother's boat."

"Good!"

After another elaborate kow-tow, Tin Bong left the house, and let himself out by the gate on the courtyard. Wharton followed him, and dropped the bar into place at the gate. It was little defence; for the wall that surrounded the place was crumbling, and could easily have been climbed. But at least the barred gate would keep out any chance visitor;

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and the less the "foreign devils" were seen, the safer they were.

Wharton returned into the room.

"We're in luck!" said Bob.

"Looks like it!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Well, fatty!"

"Is there any more grub?"

"We seem to have scooped the lot."

"I hope they'll have some grub on the boat. You'd better mention that to Ping Pong, or whatever his name is—it's important! I may as well have a nap. You fellows shut up, will you?"

Billy Bunter stretched his fat limbs on the priest's sleeping-mat. His snore was soon rumbling through the little building.

The other two juniors went out into the little courtyard, where they sat down under a rather skinny-looking banyan tree. There was nothing to do but to wait for the return of Tin Bong; and they waited anxiously.

— — —

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Upper Hand!

THE sun blazed down in the little courtyard. It was past noon now, and hot and drowsy. An hour had passed since Tin Bong had departed; and Wharton and Bob wondered how long it would be before he returned. Bob leaned his head back on the trunk of the banyan, closed his eyes, and dozed in the heat. The captain of the Remove remained wide awake.

In spite of his satisfaction at the bargain that had been made with Tin Bong, there was a half-conscious misgiving in his breast. The man looked a rogue; and he was obviously extremely poor, and the greed in his eyes at the sight of the silver dollars haunted Wharton's mind. And what he had told the juniors had not increased Wharton's faith in him. He had been interpreter to a "joss" man; which showed pretty conclusively that he was not a believer in the native gods. Likely enough, he had pretended to be a convert, for the sake of what he could get out of the "joss" man—like a good many unscrupulous Chinese. Now he was some sort of a priest dwelling in a native shrine, living on the offerings of the superstitious peasants—evidently with his tongue in his cheek.

Possibly he was not a priest at all, but some adventurer who had found the place deserted and settled down in it, imposing on the credulity of the simple country people. The juniors had not been long in China, but they knew that it was a land of the humbug that goes hand-in-hand with foolish superstitions.

Wharton had heard from Ferrers Locke, that most of the poor priests dwelling in the little wayside shrines, were simple and generally honest men. But there were a good many exceptions; and there was no doubt in his mind that Tin Bong was one of the exceptions. The man looked a rogue—and a greedy and unscrupulous rogue.

Had he known of Chong Lo and the Mandarin Tang Wang, Wharton could not doubt that Tin Bong would have betrayed his guests into the hands of their enemies.

Fortunately, he knew nothing; the schoolboys were, to him, simply three foreign devils who had foolishly wandered from the city, and lost themselves in the country. It was, fortunately, not in his power to betray them.

But was there something else up his sleeve? If he returned with a rickshaw to take them down to the river,

to a boat that would carry them back to Canton, the juniors certainly were in great luck. There was no reason why he should not act in good faith, for a just payment; except for the roguery that Wharton had read in his eyes.

But if he came back, not with a rickshaw, but with a mob of Chinese! He knew the juniors had money; and he looked the kind of man to hesitate at little for money. What was a small sum to the English schoolboys was a fortune to the dweller in that tumble-down house. Even their watches represented a larger sum than, probably, he received in a whole year in offerings at his shrine.

Wharton was deeply uneasy.

He was on the horns of a dilemma. Prudence seemed to counsel him to get out while the going was good, without waiting for the return of the Chinaman. Yet by doing so he might be turning his back on a sure chance of getting back to his friends at Canton.

Footsteps passed on the road; and Wharton listened to them. His heart gave a beat, as the steps stopped outside the gate.

There was a knock.

It awakened Bob Cherry from his doze, and he sat up. Wharton put his finger on his lips.

Bob's eyes met his, startled!

Knock!

It came loudly, sharply, impatiently. "That's not Tin Bong come back!" whispered Bob. "Anyhow, if it is, wait till he calls out."

Wharton shook his head. He was sure that it was not Tin Bong.

Bob's lips puckered in a silent whistle.

"Chong?" he breathed.

"I shouldn't wonder! Listen!"

Knock!

The knocking at the gate echoed through the enclosure, and through the little temple. If it awakened Bunter, and he came out—But it was not likely to awaken Bunter.

Wharton and Bob sat very still. It might only be some wayfarer, knocking for admittance to the shrine. If so, he was likely to pass on, when the priest did not open the gate.

Knock, knock!

The knocking came louder, savage and impatient. And now it was followed by a calling voice.

The words were Chinese, incomprehensible. But the voice was familiar to the ears of the juniors—a deep voice, but with a ready tone in it. It was the voice of Chong Lo, the scarred coolie.

Bob Cherry breathed hard.

"That's Chong!" muttered Wharton.

"They've lost us—lost track of us—but they're still after us, Bob! He can't know we're here—he's knocking up the priest to ask him if he's seen any foreign devils—"

Bob Cherry nodded. Outside the gate, the voice of Chong Lo went on in angry tones. It was plain that the man was alone; and the juniors could guess that the gang had separated, and were scouring the countryside in different directions, trying to pick up news of the escaping schoolboys.

They waited, with beating hearts. Chong's voice went on, sharp and loud; and though they understood not a single word, they knew that he was cursing the lonely dweller in the temple for not opening the gate. He ceased to shout at last; and they heard him moving along the wall.

Their eyes met again.

The Chinese was looking for an easy spot to clamber over the wall. They knew at once. Either he intended to

rouse out the priest and question him, or to search the place on suspicion that the fugitives might have hidden there if it was vacant.

Wharton pointed to the doorway, and Bob nodded. Silently they rose from their seat under the banyan and stepped into the building. From the shadowy doorway they watched the enclosure; and saw a Chinese face, under a big bamboo hat, rise into view over the crumbling wall a few yards from the gate. It was the face of Chong Lo, the scar of an old sword-cut showing up plain on the yellow cheek.

In the silence, they could hear the panting of the Chinaman as he dragged himself over the wall. His left arm was in a sling, and disabled; and the climb was not easy to him. But he clambered over and dropped into the courtyard and stood staring round him.

Wharton and Bob had picked up their cudgels.

They hoped that the man would go without entering the little temple; but if he entered— Their grip closed hard on the cudgels. They stood back from the doorway, in the shadows of the dusky room. If Chong Lo put his head inside, he was going to meet with a surprise.

From the courtyard the Chinese called again; and receiving no answer, he came across to the building.

As he reached the doorway, the sound of Bunter's snoring reached his ears, and he gave an angry grunt. Obviously, he did not know that it was the snoring of a "foreign devil." Doubtless he concluded that the occupant of the shrine was fast asleep and that that was the reason why there had been no answer to his knocking at the gate.

He came striding angrily in, calling out as he came—words of abuse, as the juniors guessed.

Wharton and Bob sprang forward at the same moment, the heavy cudgels whirling in the air. It was no time to stand on ceremony.

Crash! Chong Lo gave a gasping cry and reeled under Wharton's blow; and the next second, Bob's cudgel crashed on his head and he went to the ground like a felled ox.

He fell on his face and lay almost stunned; and in an instant Bob's knee was planted in the small of his back pinning him down. Even as he fell, dazed, his hand had clutched out a knife, and Wharton tore it from his grasp.

The fallen man, for some moments, lay almost without motion. Then his face twisted upward and his black eyes blazed.

Wharton lifted his cudgel, with a grim look.

"Keep quiet, Chong Lo," he said. "Try to lift a finger, you scoundrel, and I'll crack your skull like an egg-shell."

"Foreign devil!" hissed Chong.

He made a tremendous effort to rise. But Bob's knee, planted in his back, forced him down; and Wharton gave him a sharp tap on the head with the stick as a warning. The scarred coolie sank down again.

"Get something to tie the brute with," said Bob. "We'll make him safe now we've got him."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Here, Bunter—"

"I—I say, what—what—" stuttered Bunter. The Owl of the Remove had awakened and was staring at the scene with eyes distended behind his big spectacles. "I—I say—"

"Get a rope or something," snapped Wharton. "It's Chong, and we've got him. Tear up that mat—that will do."

"Oh crikey!"

"Buck up, fathead."

"I—I say, have you got him safe?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, ass, get a move on."

Billy Bunter, blinking uneasily at Chong, tore the mat into strips, and the strips were bound securely round

sure that he was quite safe, the juniors returned to the courtyard to wait for the return of Tin Bong.

Under the banyan tree they waited and listened, dreading to hear every moment the footsteps or voices of Chong's confederates. But there came no sound through the drowsy heat of the afternoon save the buzzing of the flies. The rest of the gang, it was clear, were not at hand; it was probable that they were far away, seeking



Crash! There was a gurgling scream as the bandit crashed down fairly on the head of Tin Bong and almost flattened him out on the floor of the pagoda!

Chong's right arm, fastening it down to his side. Then his legs were tied and knotted together. Then he was rolled farther into the room; and a lump of matting was forced into his mouth, gagging him, and tied there safely.

He lay helpless on the earthen floor his slanting eyes burning at the juniors.

Chong Lo had been hunting them, and he had found them. But he had not found them in precisely the way he had hoped.

The rage in his eyes was like that of a caged tiger. His lips foamed over the gag. Whether any of his comrades were within reach of his voice, if he shouted, the juniors did not know; but they were not taking risks. Bound, gagged, and helpless, Chong Lo lay on the earthen floor, and after making

to pick up the traces of the escaped "foreign devils." Within the dusky temple Chong lay, biting savagely on his gag, while the juniors waited in the court—Wharton still turning over in his mind the tormenting problem—to wait or not to wait!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

The Treachery of Tin Bong!

BILLY BUNTER, with his head resting against the banyan, his eyes shut and his mouth open, snored. Bob Cherry, dozing in the drowsy heat, nodded; but sleepily he watched his chum, wondering what Wharton was up to. The captain of
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the Remove, leaving them under the banyan, climbed the courtyard wall in a spot where a mass of wild wistaria was heaped on it.

Keeping covered by the trailing wistaria Wharton was able to watch the road outside the gate of the temple.

His misgivings had intensified with the lengthening of Tin Bong's absence. Several hours had passed since the shifty-eyed Chinaman had gone; and Wharton grew more and more uneasy. Now he was on the watch, from a coign of vantage where, unseen himself, he would be able to see Tin Bong as soon as he drew near from either direction. If the priest came alone, or if he came with a rickshaw and rickshaw-coolie, no doubt all would be well. If not—if treachery was intended—the juniors would have at least a few minutes warning.

Twice or thrice blue-clad peasants passed on the narrow, rugged road going down from the hills towards the distant village in the valley. The eyes of the watching junior followed them till they passed the pagoda in the distance and vanished.

The pagoda lay lonely, perhaps halfway to the village and the shining river beyond; and Wharton looked at it with curious eyes many times while he waited and watched. The building had once been a handsome one, but when he examined it more carefully, he could see that it was in a dismantled state; several of the roofs being broken in and tiles missing from all of them. No doubt it had been pillaged and dismantled in the civil warfare that had raged all over that region a few years before; the civil war that was intermittent all over the torn and distracted land of China.

If Tin Bong had gone to the river to arrange for a boat to take the schoolboys to Canton, he would pass the roadside pagoda on his return. But there was no sign of him coming as the long, hot minutes crawled by.

When the priest appeared at last, it was not from the direction in which Wharton looked for him. Close at hand, bordering the road, was a small wood, and suddenly the gaunt figure of Tin Bong, in its blue gown edged with black, appeared on the edge of the wood looking towards the temple.

Wharton's heart beat faster.

Hidden by the wistaria on the wall he watched the priest; reading, at a distance of twenty yards, the glinting cunning in his yellow face. For a few moments Tin Bong stood on the edge of the wood looking towards the temple; and then he was joined by several other figures. They were men in ragged tunics and cotton trousers, with huge bamboo hats—a rough and wild-looking crew. Among them was a man of gigantic stature, with his right arm bandaged; better clad than the rest, a man with a heavy, brutal face, and black moustaches curled up to his eyes. At the first glance Harry recognised him as the chief of the Chinese bandits who had attacked Chong Lo's party in the gorge the previous day.

He knew, now!

It was to fetch the bandits to their prey that Tin Bong had gone; and now he was returning—with four or five desperate outcasts of the hills.

Wharton's face paled a little.

Tin Bong had no intention of helping the foreign devils to return to Canton. He had lied to them, and left them waiting in the temple, like sheep for the slaughter, while he sought his outcast confederates. Wharton needed no

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further proof that his misgivings were well-founded.

He lay still in the wistaria, his heart throbbing.

From Chong Lo and his gang, the agents of the Mandarin Tang Wang, the juniors had to fear capture and delivery into the hands of their enemy at Pan-shan. But from the bandits they had to expect instant death as soon as they were within reach of the ruffians' weapons. And defence was hopeless. The flimsy walls of the temple would not protect them, if they barred the door against the bandits. It seemed to Harry that he could already hear the rustle of the wings of the Angel of Death.

He watched, his brain almost in a whirl. Hidden under the wistaria, he was invisible to the keen, shifty eyes that looked towards the temple. For a minute or two the group of Chinese stood there, on the edge of the wood,

STAND BY
for
THIS WEEK'S WINNING
JOKE!



Mrs. Brown: "Hello, Mrs. Jones. How did you come by that black eye of yours?"
Mrs. Jones: "Well, you see, my husband came out of jail on 'is birthday and I wished 'im 'Many Happy Returns'!"

W. Bibben, of 46, Holmdene Avenue, Herne Hill, S.E.24, who sent in the above winning rib-tickler, carries off one of our
USEFUL POCKET KNIVES.
MORE FUNNY STORIES
WANTED, PLEASE!

in muttering talk that did not reach him. Then they left the wood, and came down the road towards the temple.

Wharton dropped from the wall.

The expression on his face, as he ran to rejoin his comrades under the banyan in the courtyard, made Bob Cherry start to his feet.

"What—" he exclaimed.

"That villain has betrayed us!" breathed Wharton. "He left us here while he went to fetch the bandits—"

"You've seen—"

"They're coming! Tin Bong and four others—one of them the big fellow I slashed in the fight yesterday."

"Oh crumbs!"

"We've got to get out, quick! They'll be a few minutes; and the gate may stop them for a few minutes more—it's barred. We've got to run for it."

He shook Bunter into wakefulness.

The fat junior's eyes opened sleepily behind his big spectacles.

"Lemme alone!" murmured Bunter. "Look here—"

"Quick!" breathed Harry.

He dragged the Owl of the Remove to his feet.

"Has that Chink come back?"

"He's coming—with a gang of robbers! Quick!"

"Ow!"

Wharton dragged the fat junior along. They hurried to the back of the courtyard, where there was a door upon the field of Indian corn behind the temple. Swiftly the three juniors passed out into the field.

From the gate on the road came a sound of knocking, followed by the voice of Tin Bong.

"Open the gate, O honourable ones!" They heard every word across the courtyard. "It is Tin Bong who calls, and all is ready to convey your estimable lordships to the boat."

"The villain!" murmured Bob, sickened by the treachery of the wretch who, even as he called on them to open the gate, was standing in the midst of the savage gang he had brought there to murder them.

"Quick!" breathed Wharton. "Keep low and run for it! If we can get to that pagoda we may be able to hide."

"It's a chance!" muttered Bob. "Buck up, Bunter!"

"Oh—dear! I say, you fellows—Ow!" Bunter was shaking like a fat jelly with terror.

"Quick!"

The juniors passed through the field of Indian corn, and reached the rough hill-side that rose behind it. They could still hear the knocking at the gate.

Keeping their heads low, to avoid being seen if possible, they ran; Wharton and Bob holding Bunter's fat arms on either side. Without their aid the terrified fat junior would probably have collapsed. They ran and stumbled and scrambled over rough ground, amid brambles and thorns, for some distance, until Wharton judged that they could get down to the road out of sight of the gang at the temple gate. Then they scrambled down to the road, and ran their hardest in the direction of the pagoda.

The knocking had ceased now. Perhaps Tin Bong had guessed that the foreign devils had taken the alarm; or feared, perhaps, that they had departed in his absence. Leaving the gate, the bandits were scrambling over the crumbling wall of the courtyard, and they were swarming into the dusky little temple by the time the fugitives reached the road. There was no one for them to find there but Chong Lo, bound and gagged; and what might happen to Chong was a matter of very little moment to the fugitives.

Bunter gasped and spluttered and groaned as he was dragged along between the two juniors. He ran as fast as his fat little legs could move—he had never put on such speed as he put on now. Swift as they were, it seemed an age to the juniors before they reached the pagoda.

Wharton had been sure that the pagoda was ruined and deserted from his observation of it from a distance, and it was quite clear that that was the case when the juniors reached it.

It stood at some distance back from the road, and what had once been cultivated gardens, were now a wilderness of weeds and brambles and thorns.

Half the roofs of the pagoda were gone, and in those that remained tiles

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"Half-Time" Gossip!



What's the big attraction in London for footballers? "Old Ref" will enlighten you on this subject or on any other for that matter. Bombard him with any ticklish Soccer problems you like—he's willing to solve 'em!

IT is often said that confession is good, and therefore, I propose to start this week's note with a confession. Often, as I go through the letters sent to me by MAJOR readers, I find myself wishing that my middle name was Solomon. You remember how wise he was; what wonderful judgments he gave when people came to him with the most puzzling problems! Problems are set me by readers which make me think for quite a long time—and which make me quite sure that if Solomon had been my middle name it wouldn't have suited me.

However, when you take on a job, you have to go through with it, so I am not going to jib at the awkward questions. I am going to deal with one or two of them here. The first comes from a reader in Lancashire, and this is the question:

"When a spectator pays his money at a football match, can he say what he thinks while the game is in progress, or must his remarks be confined to praise of the play and the players?"

That is the sort of problem I feel like leaving to my readers, but I don't suppose for a moment your Editor would let me do that. So here goes.

When you have paid your money to see a football match, can you say just what you like in the course of the game?

In the first place, my middle name being Sherlock rather than Solomon, I think I can detect how the query arose. My Lancashire friend has heard, I take it, that the officials of the Bury football club have placed plain-clothes policemen at various places round the ground, to look and to listen for the "barrackers" and to eject those who are spotted. That, as Sherlock Holmes would have said, is "elementary, my dear Watson."

Some people who have attended at the Bury football ground, at Gigg Lane, have been "saying things" about the efforts of the home players. Obviously, the officials of the Bury club think that the payment of money at the turnstiles of a football ground does not give the spectator the right to say what he likes about the play. He can cheer as hard as he wishes, but he mustn't "boo."

I suppose if somebody, ignoring the presence of the plain-clothes policemen, does "boo" at some of the players, the police can justify his removal. The excuse of the police—if one ever needs an excuse if one is a policeman—would be that the conduct of the spectator in question was such as would be likely to lead to a breach of the peace.

Of course, Bury isn't the only place where the voice of the barracker is heard, and Bury isn't the only place where they have tried to fit "demons of silence" on to the too-candid critic.

Many a star player has been driven from this or that club in the past because the spectators have criticised his play

in language too blunt to be misunderstood, and in a voice too loud not to be heard.

In this connection, you may remember an interesting case which arose some time ago. Near the rails around a certain football ground, there was a spectator who made a "dead set" at a particular player; said some very rude things about his efforts. The player stood it for some time, and then, his blood properly up, he suddenly dashed across to the offending spectator and gave him, via his fist, a little reminder that the spectator could not go on saying what he liked with impunity. I have known, just occasionally, cases in which a referee has stopped the game, picked out a spectator who was criticizing severely, and sent for the police to move him from the ground. So the conclusion must be, that even after the football

spectator has paid his entrance money at the turnstiles, he has not bought the right to say what he likes about the play. If he is very disappointed with the exhibition he has his remedy—he can walk out of the ground, and stay away from the ground in future. But his remedy—unless he is prepared to suffer personal inconvenience, is not to tell the players in harsh language what he thinks about them.

FOLLOWING on the heels of this problem of the barracker, which was sent to me from Lancashire, comes a problem of a different kind from a young reader at Leeds. He wants to know how it is, that all the stars of the football firmament appear to be going to London. "I always understood," says this reader, "that there is a maximum wage for star footballers; that they can't be paid any more wages in London than they receive in the provinces, and that as it costs more to live in London than in the average provincial town, the footballer who thus moves, is really worse off, financially, because of the move."

You are right, good reader, in parts. It is a fact that

a footballer can only be paid a certain maximum wage—eight pounds per week—no matter for which team he plays.

He can't get more in London than in Leeds, by way of example. It is also a fact (your Editor says he knows this only too well) that it costs more to live in London than in the provinces.

This being so, how is it that David Jack, Alec. James, David Halliday, Hughie Gallacher, Alec. Jackson, and Alec. Cheyne have all left provincial clubs in recent times, to join up with Arsenal and Chelsea?

I can give the answer so far as some of these players—and others not mentioned—are concerned. There is still an idea abroad that London's streets are paved with gold, and many footballers think they can earn more money in London than in the provinces. Some of them have proved that they can. This extra money does not come directly from playing football; it comes from other jobs which are, perhaps, more easily obtained in London than in the provinces. One star footballer of my acquaintance gets his eight pounds a week for playing football for a London club, and another ten pounds a week for acting as a sort of demonstrator of sports at a big London store. Another London footballer makes a lot of money doing journalistic work in London, which he would not have been able to get if he had stayed in the provinces. So there, you are! The lure of London is really the lure of more cash, and you can't blame the star footballer who "falls for it."

NOW for a query on the technical side of the game. "We were playing a match not long ago," writes a Mansfield reader, "when a free kick was given against our team, just near the penalty line. The referee ordered all our players to stand at least ten yards from the ball, but he allowed several players of the other side, apart from the man who was taking the kick, to stand much nearer the ball. Was the referee entitled to do this?"

The reply is that the referee was quite right. There are a lot of people who think that, according to the rules of the game, all the players on the field, except the one who is kicking the ball, must be at least ten yards away when a free kick is being taken. This is not the case. The rule says that:

"no opponent must approach within five yards of the ball before it is kicked."

The rule does not say that members of the side to which the kick has been awarded must also be ten yards away.

"OLD REF."

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THE BEGGAR OF SHANTUNG!

(Continued from page 10.)

were missing, and the remaining tiles were broken and discoloured.

Thick eucalyptus trees grew round it, and bunches of bamboos; dismal remnants of what had once been cultivation.

Such sights are not uncommon in China, a land where public buildings are generally neglected; beautiful and costly structures often being allowed to fall into decay from sheer inattention. In this case also there had been damage from some foraging party of soldiers. The pagoda, which must have cost many thousands of taels to erect, was now a mere ruin. It had been a thing of beauty at one time; now it was a dismal, broken, discoloured wreck. That, however, was fortunate for the juniors. There was not a building within a mile of it, and not a soul to be seen. Gladly they plunged out of the burning sunshine into the dusky interior of the pagoda.

Fallen wreckage, broken tiles encumbered the floor, and lay in heaps amid the eucalyptus outside. They stumbled over piles of rubbish in the dark interior.

Wharton panted.

"We're out of sight now, anyhow. Those rotters must be in the temple by this time."

"They've found Chong, then!" muttered Bob.

"They're welcome to him!"

Bunter sank down on a heap of bricks, gasping.

"Oh dear! Ow! Oh dear! I say, you fellows, are they—are they coming? Oh dear! Ow!"

Wharton peered out of the shattered, doorless aperture by which they had entered. The sunshine lay in a sheet of heat on the wilderness of brambles and eucalyptus and the road beyond. But there was no sound or sign of Tin Bong or the bandits.

"They'll be rooting through the temple for us!" muttered Bob.

Wharton nodded.

"There must be some sort of a staircase here," he said. "The place has five or six stories. Here you are!"

The old stairway in the pagoda, leading up from story to story, was as ruinous as the rest of the building. Some of the steps were wholly missing, leaving gaps like missing teeth; others were shaky to the touch. But dangerous as it was, the juniors had no choice; they had to get out of sight in case the bandits looked into the building.

"I'll go first!" said Bob.

"Careful, for goodness' sake!"

"You bet!"

Bob Cherry clambered up the broken old stair in a very gingerly way. Treading softly and carefully, testing every step, holding on with hands as well as feet, he ascended. There was a sudden fluttering and squawking in the dusky gloom ahead of him, startling him so that he almost lost his hold. But it was only a bird, startled from its nest in the ruin; and it flew squealing out of a gap in the topmost roof, more startled than Bob.

"Oh, my hat!" he breathed.

"All right, Bob!" called Wharton anxiously from below.

"Right as rain!"

Bob reached the top of the steps. Through the slanting round roof above him many gaps let in the glare of the sun, shafts of gold through the gloom.

He looked down at Wharton deep below.

"Come on! You'll have to be careful; but the steps will hold. Better push Bunter up first."

"Go it, Bunter!"

"I—I say—" Bunter blinked at the crazy stairs in dismay. "I say, that staircase won't stand any weight! Oh dear!"

"Go it, fatty! We've got to get out of sight."

"I—I say, I shall fall—"

Wharton glanced out to the sunny road again. Nobody was in sight, but he could hear a sound of running footsteps.

"Quick!" he muttered. "If they find us here—"

Bunter groaned.

There was nothing else for it, and Bunter essayed the climb. How he dragged his weight up the crazy stairway seemed a miracle; but it was a case of "needs must," and Bunter reached the top at last, and joined Bob Cherry under the broken top roof.

Harry Wharton was not long in following him.

A few minutes more, and the Greyfriars juniors were crouching in the dusk and dust at the top of the pagoda. They waited, with beating hearts.

Before this, Tin Bong must know that they had fled, and the bandits would be looking for them. They could only hope that the Chinks would not search the pagoda. It was nearly a quarter of a mile from the Buddhist temple; and there were many other directions that they might have taken in their flight.

Minute followed minute. Twice the juniors heard the sound of running feet; twice they heard distant voices calling. But no footsteps approached the old tower.

"They're missing us!" breathed Bob at last. "After all, that villain, Tin Bong, knew we wanted to get to the river, to get back to Canton. Ten to one they'll look for us towards the river—"

"Most likely," agreed Wharton.

"I—I wonder what they've done to Chong."

"Blessed if I care."

"Same here! Hark!"

There was a fluttering and squeaking above a gap in the roof. A large white bird fluttered there, as if seeking to enter. It was the bird that had been startled from its nest somewhere in the dusky recesses about them.

It flew in, and there was a terrified squeak from Billy Bunter as the wings brushed him.

"Ow! What's that—Wow!"

"Shut up, you ass!" whispered Bob. "It's only a bird—"

"Oh dear!"

The bird, startled again, flew out of the gap and circled over the pagoda, uttering mournful cries.

Wharton compressed his lips.

"Quiet!" he whispered. "Not a sound! Keep still, Bunter! That bird will draw their attention this way if it doesn't settle down. It's got a nest here, I suppose."

With anxious eyes, the juniors watched the circling bird through the wide gap in which the sunlight fell. Their hearts were beating painfully. Circling and waiting over the ruined pagoda, the white bird was an advertisement that it had been disturbed from its retreat—a signal to the bandits where their victims were hidden.

Once more the bird settled into the gap. The juniors kept very still; even Bunter stilled his breathing and making

no movement. Life or death depended on the bird settling quietly in its nest. But it was unlikely enough, with the three strangers in the dusky den that had always been quiet and solitary.

The white bird sank in through the gap, rested, and peered about with bright red eyes at a little distance from the juniors; then, sighting them, it screamed and rose through the gap again. Bob Cherry made a desperate clutch at it, but in vain.

The bird shot out of the gap and resumed circling and screaming over the pagoda.

Bob gave Wharton a hopeless look.

"That's torn it!" he muttered. "The game's up!"

"Oh dear!" came from Bunter.

Wharton's eyes glittered.

"If they come for us, here, we'll make some of them sorry for themselves! Quiet! There's a chance yet."

"Hark!"

The screaming of the circling bird sounded dolorously over their heads. Another sound came to their ears from below. It was a stumbling footstep among the heaps of rubbish on the floor of the pagoda. Another footstep and another—a muttering of voices in Chinese.

The bandits were below!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Defence of the Pagoda!

HARRY WHARTON looked down the rotting stairway, his heart beating. He had no hope now. The three juniors had been tracked to their hiding-place, and the ruined pagoda below them echoed with footsteps and voices. He had a glimpse of the gigantic bandit with the curled black moustaches, of several other Chinese, of Tin Bong, in his tattered gown of blue-and-black, and, to his surprise, of Chong Lo.

Wharton had had little doubt that the scarred coolie, when he was found in the temple, would be slain by the bandits. It was amazing to see him among them, rooting in the heaps of rubbish that encumbered the floor of the old pagoda. Apparently Chong had somehow made alliance with the outcasts; evidently they had freed him, and he had joined up with them. It made little difference to the cornered juniors. With or without Chong Lo, the odds against them were overwhelming.

Wharton and Bob Cherry had their cudgels in hand. Billy Bunter lay on the mouldering old floor, where the great bell of the pagoda had once hung. The fat junior was mumbling dully.

"The game's up, old chap!" whispered Bob.

"Looks like it; but we're standing up to them."

"We jolly well are! We'll crack a napper or two before they get at us!" muttered Bob. "Bless that beastly bird—they'd never have hit on us, I think, but for that. Can't be helped."

Wharton glanced at Bunter and shrugged his shoulders slightly. The Owl of the Remove was useless in the fight that was coming; and Wharton left him to mumble.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That's Chong!" said Bob, as a voice hailed the juniors from below.

Chong was calling up the stairway. A brief search had shown that the fugitives were not concealed among the rubbish in the pagoda, and it was easy for Chong to guess where they were.

"Foreign devils! I hear you, and

see you!" called out Chong. "You come down along me, plenty quick!"

"Come and fetch us!" retorted Bob. Chong's eyes glittered up the rotten stairway, picking out the juniors in the dusk above. At the head of the narrow stair, cudgel in hand, they were in a strong position; and Chong did not seem to like the task of fetching them down.

"You listen along me," called out Chong. "You makes me prisoner, you foreign devils, along temple. Me makes friend along bandit—promise um big price helpes me takes you to Panshen. You savvy? All these feller here helpes takes you."

The juniors had guessed as much already. Tin Bong and the bandits had found Chong Lo tied up and gagged in the temple; and no doubt they had questioned him as to what had become of the foreign devils. And the cunning coolie had known how to turn their arrival to his advantage. The promise of reward was enough to enlist the Chinese bandits on his side. Chong had convinced them that he served a rich and powerful mandarin, and that it would pay them better to help him than to cut off his head.

"You hear me talkes?" went on Chong Lo. "Plenty feller here, you savvy! We got you!"

"You haven't got us yet, ugly mug!" answered Bob.

"You better come down," said Chong Lo. "My friends takes all dollas, all money; you b'long to me. S'pose you stop along top-side pagoda, these bandit feller killees you."

"Rats!"

"You come down!"

"Go and eat cokes!"

Chong's eyes glittered. He returned from the stair and spoke in Chinese to the ruffians gathered round him. There was a muttering and a flashing of swords. But the bandits still hesitated, though it was probably rather the uncertainty of the mouldering staircase than any other consideration that deterred them.

Tin Bong's reedy voice called up:

"Honourable ones, regard the words that I say to you!"

"You treacherous scoundrel!" said Harry. "Is this how you keep faith with us?"

Tin Bong shrugged his gaunt shoulders.

"What faith do foreign devils keep with Chinese?" he retorted. "Listen to me, boy! This man Chong would take you prisoner to the city of Tang Wang the mandarin, in Kwang-si. He has promised us a reward in silver dollas for you; and this he will pay, for he has sworn by Kwan. You will save your lives if you come down and give yourselves into our hands. But otherwise you must die."

"Come and fetch us, you rascal!"

Again there was a muttering among the Chinese below, and Wharton and Bob waited and watched anxiously. They were grimly determined to defend themselves; and as the Chinese had no firearms, they had a chance of making good the defence of the stairway. If

they could hold their own until night-fall, there might yet be a chance of escaping in the darkness. The remotest chance was better than surrender.

Long minutes passed.

The men below hesitated to trust themselves to the mouldering stairs, with the two juniors above ready to strike as soon as their heads came within reach.

"They don't like the prospect, old bean!" murmured Bob Cherry. "My hat! We may pull out of this yet."

"We'll try," said Harry. "Anyhow, we're not giving in!"

"No fear!"

Angry voices sounded below as the minutes passed. The bandits were angry and impotent, Chong Lo gritting

up the stairs. From below, his men watched him. As he drew nearer to the juniors, the Chinaman held out his huge sword before him, to keep off the blows of the waiting cudgels.

But to save his head he had to give as much attention to the schoolboys above him as to the tottering stairway he was ascending. There was a creaking and snapping, as his heavy foot rested on a weak spot; and the bandit gave a gasp, and lurched. Bob Cherry, leaning down, reached him with the cudgel, and gave him a sharp blow on the head.

The huge Chinaman fell on his knees on the stairway, and the sudden weight falling on an insecure step, dislodged it.

The step fell bodily away in a cloud



Billy Bunter blinked down below, and his eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at the sight of Bob Cherry with his bent neck under the sword of the executioner!

his teeth with rage. Tin Bong's greedy eyes stared up at the juniors, but the old rogue made no movement to ascend the stairs. The juniors noticed that there were more men in the old pagoda now; several of Chong's coolies had arrived. An angry argument was going on, and though the juniors could not understand the words, they guessed that their enemies were disputing who should take the lead, and the risk of crashing on the rotten stairs.

It was the bandit chief, with the black moustache, who made the attempt at last. With a huge sword gripped in his hand, the gigantic Chunk put his foot on the first step, and in a gingerly way put his other foot on the second.

Testing every step to ascertain that it would bear his weight as he came the Chinaman slowly advanced upward.

"Look out, old man!" muttered Bob.

"Hit quick, and hit hard, as soon as his napper comes in reach!" said Harry.

They waited.

Slowly, very slowly, the bandit came

of dust, and the bandit fell through the stairway. A fearful yell rang from him as he dropped his sword, and clutched wildly with both hands to save himself. Three or four steps tore loose under his frantic grasp, and the gigantic ruffian shot downwards like a falling log.

Crash!

There was a gurgling scream from below.

The bandit, crashing down, had fallen fairly on the head of Tin Bong. The wretched priest crumpled under the terrific weight, and flattened on the floor of the pagoda, the bandit sprawling over him. Bricks and dust fell on both of them in a shower, as the rest of the gang crowded back with startled cries.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob.

The gigantic bandit lay groaning, one leg curled under him. As soon as the bricks ceased to fall, his men came forward again, and pulled him away.

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THE BEGGAR OF SHANTUNG!

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But the bandit chief did not rise to his feet. It was evident that his leg was broken, and he lay groaning where his followers laid him. Tin Bong did not stir. Whether he was stunned, or whether the crash of the heavy body on his head had killed him, the juniors could not see. At all events, he lay where he had fallen, and did not move, and the savage crew below gave him no heed.

"First round to us!" said Bob breathlessly.

Angry shouts rang from below. Chong Lo shook a furious fist up at the juniors.

Their position was stronger than before. Five or six steps were missing now from the stairway, and ascent was almost impossible.

There was an angry and excited jabbering in Chinese, and then the whole crowd streamed out of the pagoda. The disabled bandit was left groaning, and Tin Bong still lying motionless. The rest disappeared from sight.

"My hat! Are they gone?" breathed Bob.

"Too much luck!" said Harry, shaking his head.

"They can't get at us."

"Not But—" The captain of the Remorse shook his head again. The bandits might have given up the contest, possibly; but Chong Lo was not likely to abandon it. It was a matter of life or death to Chong to convey his prisoners into the mandarin's hands at Shan-shan. The Red Dragon tong had no mercy for its agents who failed.

The juniors listened.

The Chinese were silent now; the angry voices had died away. It seemed that they were gone, yet Wharton realised that it was too good to be true.

"Take a look outside," suggested Bob.

Wharton nodded, and clambered up to the gap in the round roof, by which the bird had found passage. He put his head out of the opening, and a startled cry left his lips. There was a face, with gleaming, slanting eyes, within a couple of feet of him, and he realised what the silence of the enemy meant. One of the bandits had climbed the outside of the pagoda, and had almost reached the gap in the topmost roof when Wharton discovered him. Another minute, and the ruffian would have been leaping in on the juniors.

Clutching the roof, the Chinaman, a long knife between his teeth, glared at Wharton, and Wharton stared back, both of them too startled for the moment to move. The next second Wharton had grasped a loose tile from the roof, and hurled it in the face of the bandit.

There was a scream from the yellow man as he rolled back down the slanting roof.

There was a rush through the air, a yell of rage from below—a hideous thud! Loud and furious came the yell of the watching enemy; but from the man who had crashed to the earth there came no cry.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

In the Night!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Yes, old son!" said Bob Cherry gently enough.

"Are they—are they gone?"

"I don't know."

"Oh dear!"

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The red sunset fell in shafts through gaps and slits in the pagoda. Elsewhere the interior was deep in darkness.

Hours had passed, and there had been no further attack. By the broken stair it was impossible for the enemy to come, and the fate of the bandit who had rolled from the roof had evidently deterred the rest from making a similar attempt.

Round the pagoda darkness was falling. In the west, the sun sank beyond the hills towards Kwang-si and distant Yunnan. For the enemy, for long hours, had come no sound.

Looking from the gap in the roof, the juniors had been able to see nothing of them.

Where had they gone? It seemed too good to be true, but if they were still in the vicinity, they were close in cover. Possibly they hoped to draw the foreign devils out of the pagoda in an attempt at escape. But so long as a gleam of daylight lasted, the Greyfriars fellows were not likely to try that.

For a long time they had not heard the groans of the disabled bandit chief below. He had crawled out of the pagoda, and gone. Tin Bong, if he still lay there, was hidden in darkness.

Minutes that seemed like hours, hours that seemed like weeks, crawled by, and the sun sank lower and lower.

Several times, in the distance, the juniors had seen blue-clothed Chinese peasants passing on the road. Sometimes the passers-by had stared curiously towards the ruined pagoda. But not one had approached it. Once Wharton saw a passing Chinaman gather his loose garments about him and break into a run, disappearing rapidly in the direction of the distant village. No Chinese was likely to approach a spot where bandits were gathered.

There was no help for the beleaguered schoolboys. They knew that. But the enemy had been driven off, and they still nourished a faint hope of escaping after dark. It was all the hope that was left to them, and they made the most of it.

Darker and darker grew the landscape round the ancient pagoda; the hills were lost in the night; the little red temple disappeared in shadow; the last gleam of the sunset died away.

Overhead stars twinkled in a velvety sky. But darkness lay like a cloak on the pagoda and its surroundings.

"I say, you fellows, I'm hungry!"

"Never mind that, old bean," said Bob Cherry comfortingly.

Bunter blinked at him, his spectacles glimmering in the gloom.

"I'm getting famished!" he said.

"Keep a stiff upper lip!"

"Look here, we can't stick here," said Bunter peevishly. "Those beasts are gone! Let's get out!"

"Better wait a bit longer," said Harry quietly. "Once we're out of this we're done for, if they're still hanging about."

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter.

For a long hour, in dense darkness, the juniors waited and listened. There was no sound from the enemy.

Had they gone? Neither Harry Wharton nor Bob believed so, though they hoped so. But there was a faint chance that they had gone. It was, at least, unlike Chinamen to remain silent so long.

"We've got to chance it, whether they're gone or not!" said Harry, in a low voice. "We can't stop here—they could starve us out!"

Bunter contributed a faint groan.

"We shouldn't have an earthly of get-

ting away in the daylight," went on Harry. "It's night or nothing. If they're gone, all right; if they're watching for us to make a break, we may have a chance of dodging them in the dark. Not much of a chance; but it's all we've got."

"True, O King!" murmured Bob.

"Oh dear! I say, you fellows—"

"Well, fathead?"

"One of you chaps go first, and see whether they're about. If—if they're still there, then the other can stay with me—see?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

Obviously, Billy Bunter's fat thoughts were, as usual, concentrated on his fat self!

But the suggestion seemed to Wharton a good one, and he thought it over.

"Look here, that's not a bad idea, Bob," he said. "I'll go first, and if all's clear, I'll whistle. If they got me you can hang on with Bunter. Another chance may turn up. No good letting them bag the lot of us, if we can help it."

"Good egg!" said Bob. "But I'll go, old bean."

"No; I think I'll go—"

"I think you won't!"

Wharton smiled faintly.

"Toss up for it!" he said.

"That's fair!" agreed Bob. He groped in his pocket, and held out his hands in the gloom. "There's a dollar in one hand—guess which! If you're right, you go. If you're wrong, I go."

Wharton touched Bob's left hand, and it opened, empty.

"I go!" said Bob.

"I say, don't waste time, you know," mumbled Bunter. "I'm fearfully hungry! If there's a chance of getting away, you're keeping me hungry like this for nothing. You don't seem to think of that!"

Wharton and Bob made no reply to that observation. It was no time for kicking Bunter.

"Take care on the stairs, old chap!" whispered Wharton. "There's five steps broken away, and the girders, or whatever they are, are wooden—and pretty rotten. You'll have to climb down like a cat."

They exchanged a grip of the hand; and Bob Cherry swung himself down into darkness.

Wharton strained his eyes after him, his heart thumping painfully.

The stairway had been dangerous enough when the juniors had ascended it; but it was ten times more so now. Wharton felt his heart throb as there was a thud in the silent pagoda. But it was only a loose brick that had fallen.

Inch by inch, foot by foot, testing hand-hold and foot-hold with sedulous care, Bob Cherry lowered himself down the shattered stairway. Twice he had to hang on by his hands to wooden supports that creaked and trembled. But his nerve was good, and he made the descent in safety. He stood at last among the heaps of rubble on the floor of the pagoda, and a faint whistle told his chum above that he was safe down.

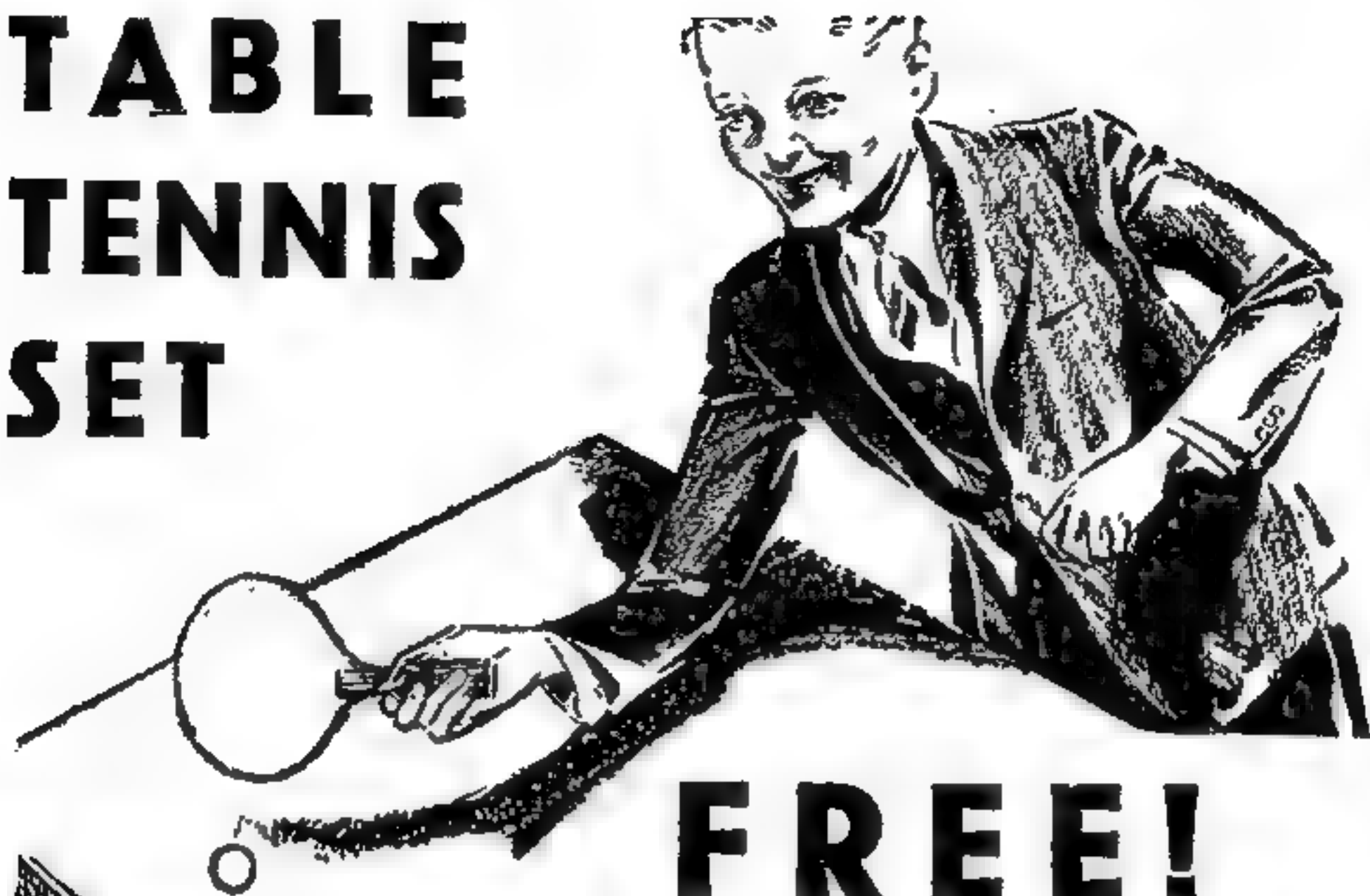
Wharton listened, with straining ears.

The descent had been safely made; but it was only the beginning. If the enemy were round the pagoda, watching—and the chances were a hundred to one that they were—Bob's chances were slim of getting through. Every second was a long-drawn agony to Wharton as he waited and listened.

He regretted now that he had not gone with his chum. Yet if it came to a struggle, two were of little more use than one against the overwhelming

(Continued on page 18.)

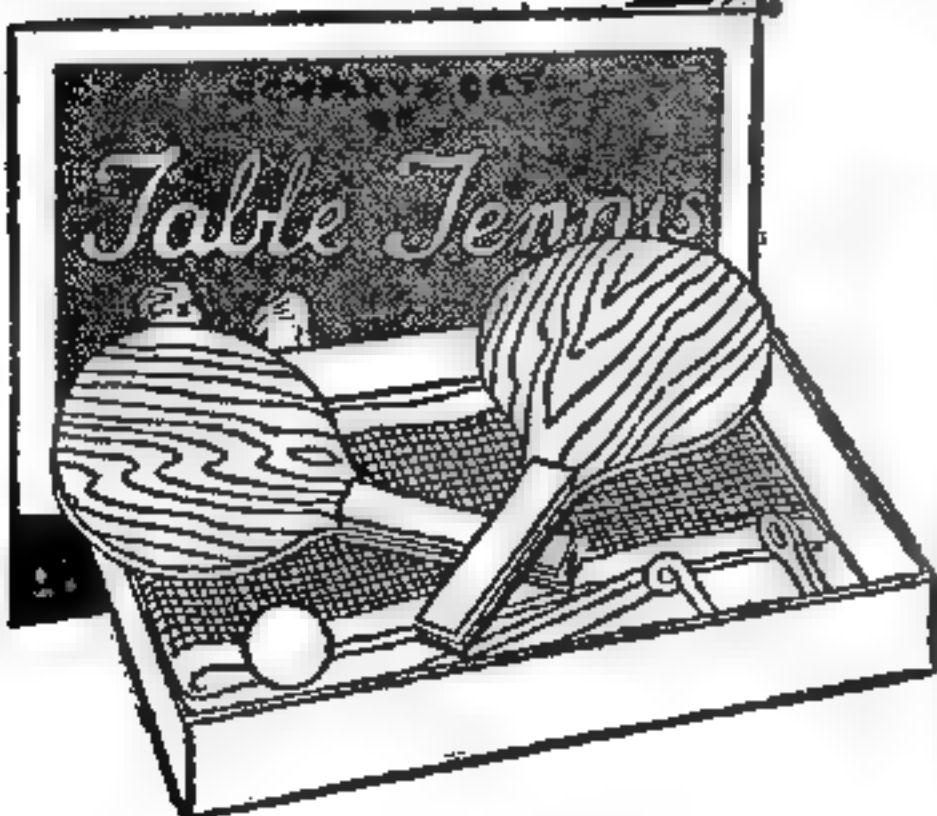
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"THE BECCAR OF SHANTUNG!"

(Continued from page 16.)

odds. His heart beat almost to suffocation as he listened.

Minute followed minute. Still silence!

Then suddenly the silence was broken by a yell—a shout—a sound of scuffling and struggling.

Wharton groaned.

The enemy were not gone! Watching, waiting, in the darkness, they had seized Bob as he sought to steal out of the pagoda. From the darkness below came the sound of fierce struggling and panting.

There was a dismal squeak from Billy Bunter.

"They've got him! Oh dear! We're done for!"

And Bunter groaned.

Wharton, heedless of the fat junior, scrambled towards the steps. His only thought was to scramble down and join his comrade, now struggling in the grasp of the Chinks.

But the struggle ceased suddenly.

From below came a panting shout.

"Look out! They've got me! Stick where you are, Wharton—stick it out, old man! Yes—"

Bob's shout broke off suddenly, and Wharton knew that a hand had been clapped over his mouth.

There was a scuffling sound. Bob was being dragged away by the Chinese. In the blackness below, Wharton detected moving shadows. Men were in the pagoda, searching for him, or watching for him to descend. He drew back from the stairway.

In the darkness his face was white. He could not help his comrade; Bob was a prisoner in many hands.

There came no further sound from Bob Cherry. Had they killed him? But it was not likely; it was a prisoner that Chong Lo sought, and enraged and vengeful as he was, he dared not slay the foreign devil whom his master had ordered him to bring alive to the yamen at Pan-shan. Bob was a prisoner, and round the pagoda, in the darkness, the enemy still lay, watching for the others.

There was no escape!

A groan came from Billy Bunter.

"They've got him, Wharton!"

"Yes!" said Harry, between his teeth.

"It's all up with us!"

"Looks like it!"

"Oh dear!"

"While there's life there's hope, old man!" said Harry, though there was little enough hope in his own heart.

A groan was Bunter's only answer. The long, long hours of the night wore away. Bunter, at last, slept; but Wharton's eyes did not close; and the dawn creeping up from the east found him wakeful and haggard.

and desperate. Not a sound had come from the Chinks during the long hours since Bob Cherry had been made a prisoner; but he knew that they were still there—watching, waiting! Another day was coming—a day without hope! But even hope of escape would have been of little comfort to Wharton; to go without his comrade would have been heart-breaking. And for Bob there was no escape.

Many times during the night he had been tempted to descend, to make some desperate attempt to help his chum, foredoomed as it was to failure. To share his fate would be something. It was chiefly the thought of Bunter that withheld him. Bunter was helpless, and it was up to him to care for the hapless Owl if he could.

To throw away his liberty or his life would effect nothing; while he was free there was always a remote chance of fortune turning up some card in his favour. Yet it was with difficulty that the captain of the Remove remained where he was, listening wearily for the enemy, watching through the long hours.

He was glad when the dawn came, hopeless as it was. As the sun rose higher, in a sky of cloudless blue, he put his head from the gap in the roof above him, and stared round. In the clear air he could see to a considerable distance on all sides.

Far off the river gleamed, and boats were moving on the shining surface, far away; a junk with strangely shaped sails showed over the bank. Near was the village, and figures in blue cotton moved midget-like. On the road peasants were tramping to labour, and he saw glances turned on the pagoda, but no one approached. If the local inhabitants knew that a gang of Chinese were awaiting "foreign devils" there, they were not disposed to intervene. Indeed, a whisper of plunder would probably have drawn scores of them to the spot to lend their aid.

Wharton had no hope of help. His thoughts turned to Ferrers Locke, but what could Locke do? He did not even know where the juniors were—though doubtless he guessed that they had been taken in the direction of Pan-shan.

He thought of his friends behind in Canton—Johnny Bull, Hurree Jameet Ram Singh—Frank Nugent, his best chum, and little Wan Lung. He knew that their hearts would be heavy with anxiety, but they could not help him. No hope of help—no hope of escape! Yet he did not despair—rather his resolution hardened, to give the enemy all the trouble he could. They might weary of their task during another long day—or, lawless as the country was, some authority might intervene—and in another night he might escape with Bunter—and somehow get help to rescue Bob. A stiff upper lip, a resolve to fight to the last gasp was the British way; to yield to despair was un-English.

Look as he might, he could see no sign of the Chinks. They were in cover among the eucalyptus and the wandering brambles. If they hoped to tempt him into an essay to leave the pagoda they were going to be disappointed. Wharton drew in his head at last, and sat down wearily. He did not think of awakening Bunter. The longer the Owl of the Remove could sleep, the better.

He wondered whether the day was to pass without a sign from the enemy. But a few hours after dawn there came a call in the voice of Chong Lo, and it came from the outside of the building.

"Foreign devil! Lookee!"

Harry Wharton put his head out of the gap in the roof again, and looked. His heart gave a bound at the sight of Bob Cherry.

Bob was standing below, his arms bound behind his back, his face pale, but steadily set. He looked up and met the eyes of his chum. Round him stood more than a dozen Chinese—Chong's gang had increased in number. Some of them looked like bandits, other's like ordinary coolies, all, evidently, were under the orders of Chong. Tin Bong was not to be seen among them.

They stared up at Wharton, grinning. Only Chong's scarred face wore no grin, but an expression of savage earnestness.

"Foreign devil! Lookee along you! friend." Chong's voice, in its clear pig-gin English, came clearly up to Wharton. "We waitee no longer, sar! B posses you no comey down, this feller killee."

Wharton caught his breath.

"Stick it out, old boy!" Bob Cherry's voice rang loud and clear. "Let them do as they like—stick it out!"

Chong, with the back of his hand, struck the bound junior across the mouth.

"You no talkee!" he snarled.

Wharton felt his heart contract. If ever he got a chance at that yellow brute, he should repent that blow.

At a sign from Chong two of the Chinks seized Bob and bent him forward, holding him with his head down. Another of the gang lifted a sword, the blade catching the sun like a gleam of light. The curved edge was raised over Bob Cherry's neck.

Wharton hardly breathed.

It was thus that victims were decapitated in China, and in utter horror he dreaded to see his chum's head roll under the stroke, as the heads of wretched criminals rolled on the Execution Ground at Canton. Earth and sky swam round Wharton for the moment.

But the blow did not fall. The gleaming curved sword remained suspended over Bob's bent neck. And Chong's evil eyes were turned up towards Wharton.

"You see, little foreign devil!" he snarled.

Wharton saw the quiver that ran through Bob Cherry, but it was only for a second. Then Bob stood as still as a statue. He could not speak again; one of the ruffians who held him had a hand over his mouth.

"We waitee no mole!" came Chong's voice. "You comey down, you foreign devil, or you see head cuttee off."

Wharton was very still.

Was the yellow demon in earnest? That the villain would kill his prisoner without the slightest compunction, he well knew. The death of a "foreign devil" would not lie heavily on the conscience of Chong Lo—if the scarred man indulged in the luxury of a conscience at all.

What Wharton had relied on was the knowledge that the Mandarin Tang Wang had ordered his men to bring the prisoners alive to his yamen at Pan-shan. He knew that the mandarin hoped to draw Ferrers Locke to that city, and the schoolboy prisoners were to be the bait.

It was upon the Baker Street detective, the man who had baffled and beaten him, the man who had saved Wan Lung from him, the man in conflict with whom Tang Leo had fallen—that the mandarin longed for revenge. The schoolboys were only pawns in the game.

For that reason—perhaps for others, too—he desired to get the juniors alive into his hands at Pan-shan. But as

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

Summary

DAWN, silver-grey, flushing in rosy-red, came up over the valley of the Che-kiang. It glimmered on the hillsides, lighted the rolling river, dispersed the shadows of the rice-fields. It came glimmering in through the gaps and rifts in the roof of the old pagoda, bringing light into the deep dusk there, but no hope.

Wharton's face was pale and haggard in the gleam of dawn; his eyes heavy.

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Screaming with rage Bung clutched at Wharton's throat. Then as his lips were almost within touch of the junior's ear, he whispered one word in English: "Courage!"

the curved sword gleamed over the bent neck of Bob Cherry. Wharton realized with a shudder that he was depending on a very frail reed.

Chong's savage face was earnest enough. So far as he was concerned he would have been glad to give the order to strike. Dared he slay his prisoner?

Frozen with horror and dread—dread for his chum—Wharton stood silent, watching, head and shoulders out of the gap in the pagoda roof—his heart beating to suffocation.

Chong's evil eyes never left his face. "You savvy?" It seemed as if the yellow demon read the thoughts that were racing through the junior's mind. "The great lord, Tang Wang, say, blug prisoner along Pan-shan! He likes plenty takes three prisoner. Sposey you no comey, no waites plenty long timee, takes two prisoner. This one doades. You savvy, you foreign pig?"

Wharton did not speak.

It was borne in upon his mind that the savage Chinaman was in deadly earnest.

Sooner or later, hunger and thirst would deliver into Chong's hands the two juniors in the tower. It was only a matter of patience and waiting. And for that weary waiting Bob Cherry's life would pay in advance.

Wharton felt, shudderingly, that it was his comrades' death he was to look upon in the bright sunlight; that, or surrender.

Bob made a sudden movement. For a moment he freed his mouth from the grasping hand, and Wharton heard his voice again.

"Don't! Stick it out."

He was silenced again the next moment.

Chong's eyes glittered up, evil, slanting eyes, snake-like, malicious, un pitying.

"You comey?" he jeered.

Wharton tried to think.

There was a movement beside him, and a bullet head and a fat face adorned by a large pair of spectacles, was put out of the gap in the pagoda roof.

Billy Bunter blinked down at the scene below.

His fat face was white, his eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at the sight of Bob Cherry with his bent neck under the sword of the executioner.

"I—I say—" he stuttered.

"You comey?" Chong's voice rang from below. "Me tinkee plenty talkes! You comee, or cuttes off head!"

Bunter grasped Wharton's arm.

"I—I say, better chuck it," he mumbled. "We can't get away, anyhow—there ain't a dog's chance. And those beasts will give us some grab, at least."

Wharton looked at him.

"I'm frightfully hungry!" said Bunter. "We can't stick it out here much longer! They'll get us, and—"

Chong Lo raised his hand.

"You speakee?" he called out.

Wharton set his teeth. It went against the grain; yet what chance was there, in the long run, of escape? And he knew now that the savage Chink was in earnest—Bob Cherry was within a hair's breadth of death. To save the life of his chum—!

Chong made a sign to the ruffian who held the sword. There was a gleam in the sunlight as the blade moved.

A hoarse cry broke from Wharton's dry throat.

"Stop!"

Chong looked up, an evil grin on his yellow face.

"Stop!" panted Wharton. "We give in! We surrender! Stop!"

The die was cast!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Kung, the Son of Shing!

BILLY BUNTER, on the whole, was rather glad of the change. In the old pagoda he had been hungry—and not merely hungry, but famished. He had realised with awful clearness the feelings of people in an open boat at sea. But in the palanquin that swung along the road over the hills there was a bowl of rice—and other things—on Bunter's fat knees, and Bunter was stuffing happily.

The change, in Bunter's opinion, was ever so much for the better. What awaited the prisoners at Tang Wang's city in Kwang-si was not, for the time, in Bunter's thoughts. Chong, at least, was feeding his prisoners, and that, for the moment, was, in Bunter's estimation, the one thing needful. And Bunter, dismissing other matters from his fat mind, stuffed, and beamed over his provender.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were far from beaming. They had eaten, and had been glad to eat, and now their hands were bound again. Bunter was left with one fat paw free to finish his meal, and Chong looked into the palanquin occasionally to see whether he had finished—not that Bunter was likely to finish while anything eatable remained.

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Four coolies carried the palanquin; and before and behind it a number of men marched, all of them armed. The attack of the bandits had very nearly lost Chong his prisoners, and he was taking no more risks on the journey to Pan-shan. During the long delay at the pagoda Chong had evidently sent messengers, for more than a score of men were now in the party—members, as the juniors guessed, of the Red Dragon tong. Chong Lo was now strong enough to resist any gang of bandits that might haunt the road into Kwang-shi.

For the Greyfriars fellows the game was up! They had made a gallant fight for their freedom, but fortune had gone against them. Once more they were on the road to Pan-shan—on the way to delivery into the hands of the mandarin.

If they had gained anything, it was that Ferrers Locke had been given time to act. And that was something. They were assured that Ferrers Locke was at work; that anything that could be done for their rescue was being done by the Baker Street detective. And their escape from Chong had delayed the journey to Pan-shan by a day and a half. That, at least, gave Ferrers Locke time.

What could Locke do? They could not tell; but, at least, they were sure that he was not idle. Certainly he would not remain at Canton and leave them to die at Pan-shan.

Open force could effect nothing against Tang Wang. In his own city in the interior he was all-powerful. But Ferrers Locke was a master of strategy. He was not idle, that was certain. And the juniors' faith in him was strong.

It was their only hope.

Mile after mile passed under the tramping feet of the coolies. Every now and then the bearers of the palanquin were changed. Beside the score of armed men who now formed Chong's guard, there were more than a dozen coolies in the party.

They were out of the hills now and following a highway that ran between great plains rich with rice. The juniors wondered whether they had now left the province of Kwang-tung behind and

entered the sister province of Kwang-shi. They could not tell.

Many people were passed on the road—sometimes a traveller carried in a chair, sometimes a palanquin, sometimes Chinese riding camels. Mostly the passengers were blue-clad peasants on foot, and most of these drew to the farthest edge of the road to let the party go by, awed by the sight of armed men. Once a party of Chinese soldiers appeared on the road, and their officer ordered the party to halt; and the juniors, peering out of the curtains of the palanquin, wondered whether this meant trouble. Soldiering and brigandage are very near akin in China.

There was a long jabber in Chinese between Chong and the Chinese officer. The latter pulled aside the curtains of the palanquin and stared in at the "foreign devils," and then marched on with his men. The soldiers disappeared down the road, and the palanquin swung onward. And a dozen or more peasants who had bolted out of sight when the soldiers appeared came back to the road and resumed their way. Any wretched peasant who fell in the way of Chinese soldiers on the march was liable to be seized and forced to carry baggage.

Bob Cherry gave a grunt.

"I thought for a minute that that soldier chap was going to butt in," he remarked. "No luck!"

"Tang Wang is on pally terms with the war-lord in Kwang-shi," answered Harry. "I suppose these soldiers belong to that lot. If they had butted in they would have cut off our heads, as likely as not. I'm rather fed up with China, and Chinese manners and customs, Bob."

"Same here!" said Bob.

"Prime!" said Bunter.

"What?"

"Splendid!"

"What's splendid, you frabjous gu?"

"This grub!" said Bunter. "The Chinese are a filthy lot, but I'm bound to say that they can cook. I wonder if that Chong beast would give me some more? It's really prime!"

Chong Lo looked in. He took away the empty bowl, called a coolie, and Bunter's arms were bound again.

Bunter grunted and settled down in the palanquin.

"After all, matters might be worse!" he remarked.

"How's that, fathead?"

"Well, they might be making us walk, you know."

Bunter closed his eyes and opened his mouth. A gentle snore proceeded from him. Fortunately, the uncertain prospect ahead did not keep Bunter from sleeping. The palanquin swung on, to the accompaniment of a rumbling snore.

It was hot; brilliant sunshine streamed down on the road and the rice-fields. One of the curtains of the palanquin was left open, possibly to enable Chong to keep an eye on the juniors within. Chong walking with tireless legs beside the vehicle. Since his narrow escape of losing his prisoners Chong Lo had been as watchful as a cat.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob. "That's a jolly old scarecrow, if you like!"

On the road ahead the tattered figure of a Chinese beggar-man appeared, and he had looked round at the approaching party and stopped.

The juniors saw a wrinkled, gaunt, yellow face; a gaunt figure in a tattered blue gown, with bare feet.

They had seen a good many mendicants in China, but never one more wrinkled and tattered and miserable-looking.

Had their hands been free, and had any money been left in their possession, they would certainly have tossed a few dollars into the begging-bowl which the old man was holding out.

With bowed head and extended bowl, the beggar waited for the palanquin to come up. His whining, sing-song voice was heard as they approached.

"O generous ones, have pity on the poor! Give of your compassion to Hung, the son of Shing, who has travelled far distances, even from the Great Wall in the north, to seek food at the hands of the open-hearted and generous people of Kwang-shi."

The words were in Chinese, and the juniors understood nothing of them. Some of the party grinned, and one of the armed men tossed a few copper cash into the begging-bowl.

A torrent of thanks burst from the mendicant. He called down the blessings of the sun and moon upon the generous giver.

"Stand aside, O fool!" rapped out Chong Lo. "Will you delay us to listen to your voice of a hawk?"

The beggar-man looked at him and kow-towed to the ground, touching the earth with his forehead.

"O great and magnificent one, deign to permit this humble worm to crawl at your feet. Give of your compassion to Hung, the beggar who has travelled many weary li from far Shantung, and permit him to crawl in the shadow of your magnificence."

Chong, apparently, was not in a compassionate mood. He spurned the old beggar away with his foot.

"Away, old fool!" he snapped.

Hung, the son of Shing, picked himself up, under the grinning and jeering of the whole party.

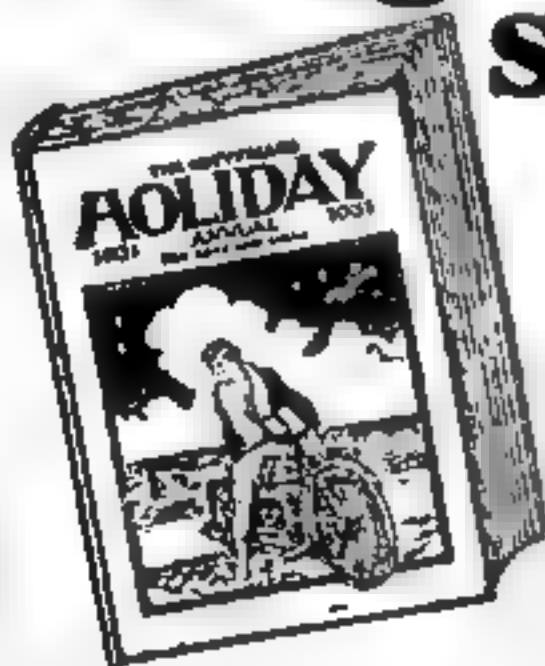
He seemed about to back away; and then his eyes fixed on the faces of Wharton and Bob Cherry, staring from the palanquin.

A sudden change came over his face.

The wrinkled visage seemed convulsed with fury and hate, and the sunken eyes under the shaggy brows blazed.

"You carry foreign devils!" he howled.

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He pointed with a shaking finger at the prisoners in the palanquin.

"Peace, old man!" said Chong. "The foreign devils are prisoners, who go to torture and death! Stand aside!"

The old man did not heed him.

Dropping his begging-bowl, careless of the copper cash that scattered in the road, he made a spring at the palanquin, and grasped Wharton by the throat.

So sudden was the action that no hand was raised to stop him, and Wharton, with his arms bound, could make no resistance.

The beggar was screaming with rage.

Hatred of the foreign devils seemed to be boiling over within him; he jabbered and yelled with fury as he clutched the junior's throat.

Chong stared blankly, and there was a laugh from some of his men. Hatred of foreigners was a feeling with which they sympathised.

Hung, the son of Shing, forced the helpless junior backwards, his wrinkled face close. Wharton, helpless to resist, looked for instant death, as the fierce eyes glared into his and the savage face almost touched his own.

Then, with the lips of Hung within touch of his ear, the Chinese beggar-man whispered one word, in English:

"Courage!"

The next moment Hung was grasped by Chong's powerful hand, and Hung aside.

He staggered, and sprawled full length in the road.

The palanquin swung on, leaving him sprawling. Harry Wharton lay back in the palanquin, gasping for breath, his

face white, his eyes staring. For the voice of the Chinese beggar-man that had whispered one word in his ear, was the voice of Ferrers Locke.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

In a Chinese Inn!

FERRERS LOCKE!

He knew it; though he could hardly believe it. Hung, the tattered beggar-man, was the Baker Street detective, in a disguise that Wharton would never have dreamed of penetrating.

He panted for breath.

Bob Cherry had not heard the whisper. Only Wharton had heard it, and he sat dazed with astonishment. Bob put his head out of the palanquin, and looked back.

The beggar-man had picked himself up and picked up his bowl, and was carefully gathering the scattered copper cash in it.

Having gathered up the coins he resumed his way, doddering along at a considerable distance behind the cavalcade.

"Pretty ferocious old Chink!" said Bob. "Did he hurt you, old man?"

Wharton shook his head.

Savage and ferocious as the clutch of Hung on his throat had seemed, it was only in seeming. That ferocious attack had, as Wharton realised, been the only way of getting near enough to him to whisper without rousing the suspicions of his captors.

Ferrers Locke! Even yet, with the whispered word "Courage!" still lingering in his ear, Wharton could hardly credit it.

Chong looked into the palanquin, with a grin.

"Chinese no likes foreign devil, you savvy!" he remarked. "Sposey great lord Tang Wang no wantee you pisanor, me lettee ole beggar man killy you plenty quick, you savvy! He like killy you too much!"

And Chong stepped back and tramped on.

Evidently there was not the faintest suspicion in the mind of the scarred Chinaman.

Wharton sat silent, breathing hard. Far back down the road the tattered beggar was following.

Bob looked at his chum curiously.

"Sure he didn't hurt you, old bean?"

"Quite!"

"You're looking rather queer."

"It's all right."

There was danger of being overheard, and Wharton dared not tell his comrade what he had learned. He waited for an opportunity.

It was some time before Chong left the side of the palanquin, going on to speak to some of the men who marched ahead.

This was Wharton's chance; and he bent forward towards Bob.

"Bob, old man"—his whisper was barely audible—"that Chinese beggar-man—" He paused and glanced at Bunter. But the Owl of the Remove was fast asleep. "He whispered to me in English—"

"What's that?"

"It's Ferrers Locke!"

(Continued on next page.)



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Bob Cherry gave a jump.

Wharton leaned back again. Chong was dropping back to his place beside the palanquin; his eye was never off the prisoners for long.

Bob stared blankly at Wharton.

"My only hat!" he breathed.

Chong's eyes were on the prisoners, and Wharton wriggled his neck, as if in pain. Chong Lo grinned. If the grasp of the old beggar who so hated foreign devils had hurt the prisoner, it did not worry Chong Lo. And Wharton did not want him to guess that that fierce clutch on his throat had not hurt him at all.

The beggar man was trailing at a distance behind the palanquin. He had been, apparently, heading for Pan-shan when the party passed him. There was nothing to excite suspicion in his following on. But if suspicion were once excited the Baker Street detective would be cut to pieces or carried a prisoner to Pan-shan with the juniors.

Locke had no chance in a conflict with the numerous gang that guarded the palanquin. And Wharton, after one glance, resisted the temptation to look out again. The sooner he appeared to forget the existence of Hung, the son of Shing, the better.

Bob Cherry's eyes were dancing.

"My only hat!" he repeated.

Billy Bunter's eyes opened.

"I say, you fellows!"

He sat up and blinked at his fellow-prisoners.

"I say, I'm thirsty! I suppose those beasts are going to give us something to drink. I say, you Chink!"

Chong Lo looked in.

"Thirsty!" said Bunter. "Wanted water, savvy?"

"No dlinkee fol foreign devil!" scolded Chong, and he tramped on without heeding Bunter further.

Bunter groaned.

"I say, you fellows——"

"Go to sleep again, old fat bean!" suggested Bob Cherry.

The advice was good; and Bunter, fortunately, was always able to sleep. After a few diurnal groans he snored once more.

Wharton and Bob Cherry had not slept the previous night, and in the drowsy heat of the afternoon they dozed off. Again and again the bearers of the palanquin were changed, the steady journey kept on without a pause. The juniors slept fitfully, and each waking moment brought thoughts of the disguised detective following far in the rear.

They longed to look out and see whether he was still in sight; but they were very careful not to do so. It was certain that Locke would not lose sight of them, and it was very needful to do nothing that might draw the special attention of their captors upon Hung, the son of Shing.

Onward the journey went towards the setting sun. Shadows lengthened over the plains; night was at hand.

The juniors had wondered whether they would reach Pan-shan before night. Apparently, however, the city was still far off. They were not sorry for that. They were very far from keen to find themselves under the cruel, mocking eyes of Tang Wang and to hear the gates of Pan-shan close behind them.

In the deepening dusk the party halted at last.

"Some sort of an inn!" said Bob Cherry, looking out in the falling shadows.

High square walls enclosing perhaps a quarter of an acre stood grim by the roadside. In front were huge gates of timber, roofed in the Chinese way. The gates were swung wide open now, and travellers with donkeys and camels were passing in.

That they were now in Kwang-ai, and in the region where Tang Wang's influence was powerful, the juniors could guess, for Chong Lo marched his party into the inn enclosure like an ordinary traveller, careless of the curious eyes turned on the palanquin. Near to Canton, Chong had not ventured to let it be seen that he was carrying off prisoners. Now he was in a province where he had nothing to fear.

Many of the travellers in the inn yard saluted Chong with deep respect. He was evidently recognised as a man in the service of the powerful mandarin.

The inn-keeper kow-towed before him, almost wriggling in the dust at his feet, announcing his joy that so magnificent a personage should deign to shed the light of his presence on so poor a hotel.

The three juniors were taken out of the palanquin.

Their arms were unbound, and in the dusk of the enclosure they were the centre of a hundred pairs of curious staring eyes.

On one or two yellow faces they thought they detected signs of commiseration; but in general the looks of the Chinese were mocking and jeering—few seemed to have any pity to waste on foreign devils.

Probably, however, there were a good many who felt compassion for the hapless prisoners, but dared not give a sign of it for fear of the powerful mandarin.

"Smelly sort of show," murmured Bob, as he looked about him.

It was the juniors' first experience of a Chinese inn.

The front was filled by the house of the innkeeper, and the great gates, set in the high wall. Along one side wall, inside, stables extended, open to the courtyard, and many of these were occupied by asses and camels. On the other side was a row of small rooms, or, rather, cells, which were the apartments for the occupation of guests. At the back was a separate building, called the No. 1 room, and reserved for specially distinguished guests—lordly personages whom the innkeeper delighted to honour.

The No. 1 room was not for the foreign devils. They were led along the row of cells, and a door was opened, and they were pushed in.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

Bunter groaned.

Beggars could not be choosers, and prisoners could not expect luxurious quarters. But the rooms of a country inn in China were rather the limit, from the point of view of the Greyfriars fellows.

The cell was small. The floor was of bare earth, stamped hard; the furniture a rickety table and two or three rickety chairs of bamboo; the bed was the kang—merely a raised platform, with a length of dirty matting thrown over it.

Had the juniors been ordinary guests instead of prisoners, their accommodation would have been the same—that is, unless they could have afforded to engage the No. 1 room, which was perhaps one degree better and cleaner.

The cell was dirty, stuffy, evil-smelling; if it was ever cleaned it showed few signs of it.

The looks on the juniors' faces brought a grin to the sour and savage visage of Chong Lo.

"Foreign devil, no likee!" he asked.

"Can't say I'm gone on it," said Bob. "I've seen cleaner places than this in my time."

"Plenty good nuff foreign devil," said Chong.

Leaving two of his armed men on guard at the door, the scarred Chinese stalked away. He went towards the No. 1 room, which was apparently to be placed at the disposal of the servant of the mandarin.

Billy Bunter sat down on the kang and groaned.

"I say, you fellows, this is beastly."

Wharton and Bob did not heed Bunter. They were looking out of the open doorway on the big dusky courtyard. A tattered figure had appeared in the great gateway of the inn, with a whining voice and a begging-bowl.

One or two of the travellers tossed copper cash into the bowl, and the inn servants raised no objection to the beggar limping into the courtyard. There was no cell for him, but he was welcome to curl himself up on his mat in a corner of the courtyard and sleep in the open air, safe from thieves and robbers for the night. The juniors could see two or three other such tattered figures scattered about.

But for that whispered word in the palanquin they would never have dreamed that this tattered mendicant was any different from the rest.

They knew him again at once, but search with their eyes as they might, they could detect no sign of a white man under the Chinese disguise.

Hung, the son of Shing, came slowly along the long row of cells, with begging-bowl and whining voice. As he came nearer the two juniors scanned him more closely in the failing light, but his face was Chinese to the eye—even the eyes seemed to slant. They were aware that Hung was seeking not alms but information of their whereabouts, and Bob Cherry suddenly began to speak in a loud voice.

"I'm jolly hungry, Wharton! I suppose they're going to let us have some supper."

The beggar's face was turned towards the cell, and they knew that he had heard Bob's voice.

This time, however, Hung did not seem to heed the foreign devils. He turned away and spread his ragged sleeping-mat under a banyan-tree that grew in the courtyard, and laid down.

Wharton's eyes met Bob's.

Locke knew where they were now, and he was lying, in affected slumber, less than twenty feet away. The juniors felt their hearts beat. The night was before them; not till dawn would the journey to Pan-shan be resumed. They were guarded; but Ferrers Locke was at hand. The night was not likely to be uneventful.

It was half an hour before a coolie brought bowls of rice and a pitcher of water for the weary juniors. The food and water were placed inside the room; then the door was closed. On the door was no fastening, but they heard the two guards spread sleeping-mats and lie down before it. It was impossible to attempt to leave the cell without awakening them.

They ate their supper and shared the pitcher of water. Billy Bunter blinked discontentedly at the kang.

"I suppose they call this a bed in China!" he grunted.

"All the bed there is!" said Harry.

"Well, I suppose I've got to put up with it. What are you fellows going to do?"

Without waiting for an answer to that question Bunter stretched himself on the

kang, pulled his head on his arm, and went to sleep.

Wharton and Bob exchanged a grin.

As a matter of fact, they were not thinking of sleeping that night. The Owl of the Remove was welcome to the bed, such as it was.

They sat down on the creaking chairs, leaning back against the wall, and waited. Slowly the hubbub in the great courtyard of the inn died away. The braying of donkeys, the snoring of camels, the endless cackle of Chinese voices, were silent—or almost silent—at last. The great gates were shut and barred and chained for fear of robbers and bandits, or wandering, plundering soldiers. Silence and slumber—but in the cell of the three prisoners two were wide awake, watching and waiting.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Ferrers Locke to the Rescue!

HUNG, the son of Shing, raised his head from his sleeping-mat and looked round him in the shadowy starlight of the great courtyard.

Nothing escaped the keen, searching eyes that, from the detective's skilful make-up, looked old and sunken and slanting.

Slowly Ferrers Locke raised himself to his feet.

For some minutes he stood under the banyan, in deep shadow, watching and listening.

Sounds of a restless animal came from the direction of the long line of stables that filled one wall of the court—sounds from some hapless donkey over-driven and over-beaten. There was little other sound in the silence of the night.

Dotted along the courtyard, on mats, were many sleepers, who preferred the open air of a summer night to the stuffy cells, or who could not afford to pay for the rooms. Across the doorway of the prisoners' cell two armed men lay in slumber. A score or more of Chong's men were scattered about, Chong himself sleeping in the No. 1 building a score of yards away. High walls surrounded the court, and the great gates were secured for the night, and could not be opened without a clangour that would have alarmed the whole establishment. The task before the Baker Street detective was not an easy one.

Ferrers Locke's nerve was like iron, his brain like ice. Never had he been cooler or more collected. But he knew that the rescue of the prisoners was a desperate chance—that everything was against him. Under the tattered blue gown was his automatic and a razor-edged sheath-knife. He was prepared to

use either without the slightest hesitation. But if it came to that the odds were too overwhelming.

Yet the Baker Street detective had some cause for satisfaction. He was, at least, in touch with the kidnapped juniors, and that was much.

In his disguise as Hung, the beggar, Locke had haunted the roads out of Kwang-tung leading in the direction of Pan-shan. Unsuspected, he had asked many questions and picked up information. His knowledge of the Chinese tongue was equal to the test, for by calling himself a man of the north, from Shantung, he accounted for any difference in speech to the ears of the local Chinese. The speech of North

prisoners before they reached Tang Wang's yamen at the inland city. Once they were within the gates of Pan-shan, his task would have been infinitely more difficult.

He had picked up a fragment of information here and there; on the Canton side of the hills. He had been fairly certain of the road that Chong was following, and that he was conveying his prisoners in a palanquin. But he had lost all trace of them at last, and concluded that they had made the best of their start, and were far ahead of him. It was a startling surprise to him, when he encountered the palanquin on the road. Something evidently had delayed Chong's journey to the west,



"Ow! Help!" gasped Bunter, clinging desperately to the wall. "Help me up, you fellows!" A shove from behind helped the fat junior up in the nick of time.

and South China differs very widely—in fact, many northerners and southerners are quite incomprehensible to one another. Any error of speech, therefore, was fully explained by Hung being a native of Shantung, a province many a long hundred miles from Kwang-tung.

No one had suspected him, or dreamed of suspecting him. Even the Greyfriars juniors would not have imagined for a moment that he was anything but what he seemed, but for that whispered word in the palanquin.

Not for an instant had it crossed the mind of Chong Lo, that there might be an enemy at hand; now that he was in his own province of Kwang-si, among a population who lived in fear of the power of Tang Wang.

Locke had watched, listened, inquired, along the road that led to Pan-shan, hoping to come upon Chong and the

though Locke could not guess what it was.

Whatever it was, it had given the Baker Street detective the chance he longed for; of attempting the rescue of the prisoners before the gates of Pan-shan closed behind them.

Difficult as his task now was, it was easy, compared with what it would have been, had the juniors been within the walls of the mandarin's yamen.

He had his chance now; his last chance, for on the morrow Chong would reach Pan-shan. Once they were there, even Ferrers Locke doubted whether he could save them.

The detective moved out of the shadow of the banyan at last. He moved slowly along the courtyard, picking up with a stick among the heaps of refuse and garbage, occasionally snatching up some fragment, and placing it in his pouch. That was a

customary occupation of a Chinese beggar; and any sleeper's eye that opened and fell on him, saw nothing suspicious in the movement of Hung.

Like a scavenger, he moved across towards the cell where the Greyfriars juniors were shut in.

On their nits, outside the door, two Chinese lay sleeping, bared swords by their sides. Near the door was the only window of the room; made, like most Chinese windows, of oiled paper. Glass windows were far too expensive a luxury for a country inn in Kwang-si.

Locke stood for a long minute, motionless, listening to the steady breathing of the sleepers.

Then the keen edge of his knife glided over the paper in the window, cutting a long slit, without a sound.

He heard a quick breath within.

The keen knife slitted again, and there was an opening. Without a sound, the detective cut the paper from the window, and laid it gently on the ground.

The Chinese on the mats still slept undisturbed. A tearing of the paper window from within would have awakened them fast enough. But the keen knife had made no sound.

In the darkness within the room, Ferrers Locke discerned two pairs of bright eyes. Wharton and Bob Cherry were wide awake, and on the watch. He had expected that; as he had expected to hear the rumbling snore of Billy Bunter.

Bunter, stretched on the kang, snored peacefully. Wharton and Bob stood just within the little window, silent.

The detective's head and shoulders were a black silhouette against the dimness of the night. But they knew who it was—who it must be. They did not speak; waiting for Ferrers Locke.

But for long moments, there was silence. Locke was listening to the breathing of the two Chinese sleeping only a yard from his feet.

They slept on undisturbed.

The faintest of whispers, at last, reached the ears of the two juniors. They strained their hearing to catch the whispered words. They could hear the breathing of the guards outside the door, and understood only too well that an incautious sound might ruin all.

"Get ready!"

"We're ready!" breathed Wharton.

"Waken Bunter—as quietly as possible! All depends on silence."

"I understand."

"You will squeeze through the window, as quietly as you can. If the guards awaken, leave them to me."

"Yes!" breathed Harry.

"If you miss me in the dark, make for the corner of the courtyard—on the left-hand side of the great gate."

"Yes."

"In that corner, the wall can be climbed without much difficulty. It is eight feet high; but there are broken bricks. If I am not with you, climb over the instant you get there."

"Yes."

"Once in the road, cut across to a clump of trees on the other side, and stop there till I join you. I may have to cover your retreat."

"Yes."

"Lost no time!"

One of the sleeping Chinese stirred a little. Ferrers Locke vanished into the darkness.

It was indeed a time for caution. The slightest sound and they would be discovered and their last chance of escape gone. Four lives were at stake in what happened during the next few minutes!

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

At the Last Moment!

HARRY WHARTON and Bob Cherry stood, in the darkness of the little evil-smelling room, their hearts thumping. Locke had vanished; and the Chink who had stirred had settled down again. It seemed to the juniors, for the moment, that the throbbing of their hearts was loud enough to awaken the guards. But they calmed themselves.

Locke had vanished; but he was at hand. The window, small as it was, was large enough for the juniors to climb out; even for Billy Bunter to squeeze through. But it was too much to hope that the escape could be made without awakening the guards who slept so near at hand. But the Baker Street detective was there to deal with them if they awakened.

Wharton wiped the perspiration from his brow.

He moved towards the kang, where Billy Bunter slept soundly, snoring as peacefully as if he were back in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars.

His first proceeding was to place his hand over Bunter's mouth.

It was well that he did so, for that capacious mouth opened for a startled gasp, as Bunter awakened.

Wharton pressed hard, and the gasp was stifled. Only a faint "groogh!" emanated from William George Bunter.

His eyes blinked up at Wharton in startled terror. The captain of the Remove whispered into a fat ear.

"Quiet!"

Bunter wriggled impatiently. His first thought on awakening, and feeling a grasp over his mouth, was that he was in the hands of a Chinese bandit. He glared up at Wharton, as he realised that it was only the captain of the Remove who was disturbing him.

He tried to speak; but the pressure of the hand on his mouth silenced him effectually. Wharton whispered again.

"Not a sound! Quick, if you want to save your life."

"Mmmmm!" came faintly from Bunter.

"Ferrers Locke is here to help us. Quiet! We've got to crawl through the window! You know what will happen if the Chinks wake up! Quiet! Do you understand? It's our last chance to escape."

Bunter nodded.

Wharton removed his hand from the fat junior's mouth, and Bunter sat up on the kang, and grunted.

"I'm ready! Wait till I get my spectacles."

"Quiet!"

"Oh really, Wharton—"

"Quick, you idiot!" breathed Wharton fiercely.

Billy Bunter suppressed a snort, groped for his spectacles, and jammed them on his fat nose. He yawned as he rolled off the kang.

"Hark!" breathed Bob Cherry.

The juniors stood still, scarcely breathing. There was a stirring movement outside the door. They heard one of the sleeping Chinamen turn over.

Some faint sound from the room, perhaps, had reached him in slumber. They listened in anguish; even Bunter keeping as silent as a mouse in the neighbourhood of a cat.

They heard the man settle down again on his mat.

But for long minutes they did not stir. It was Bunter who broke the silence.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Quiet!"

"Look here—"

"Shut up, fathead!" hissed Bob.

"Better try it on now," whispered Wharton. "They seem to be asleep! You first, Bob, and we'll help Bunter through."

Bob Cherry negotiated the little window with care. He wriggled through the small space, lowered himself, and set his feet on the ground. A glimmer of starlight showed him the two Chinese sleeping on the mats only a yard away; farther off, a score or more of slumbering figures dotted about in the shadows.

He stood close up to the window, ready to help Bunter out.

It was no easy task for the fat junior to negotiate the window. Bunter was not slim, and he was anything but agile. Wharton helped him up from within, and the fat figure of the Owl of the Remove blocked the window. Bob Cherry grasped him from outside.

There was a fierce whisper from Bunter.

"Owl! You're pinching me!"

Bob suppressed his feelings. The fat Owl was drawn from the window a good deal like a cork from a bottle—with an unavoidable rustling and scraping.

He stood gasping beside Bob Cherry in the dim, starlit courtyard.

"Owl! I say—"

"Quiet!" breathed Bob.

The men on the sleeping-mats were stirring. Faintly, like a shadow in the darkness, the figure of Hung loomed, his hand under his blue, tattered gown. The automatic was ready, if it came to that.

Harry Wharton was squeezing through the window.

He dropped outside, beside Bob Cherry and Bunter. But two startled figures were leaping from the mats now, and there was a gasping shout of surprise and rage.

A sword flashed up in the starlight.

Crack!

Sharp and clear the automatic rang, and the yellow man dropped to the earth, screaming, shot through the body.

The other Chinaman, spitting like a cat in amazement and fury, swung round on Locke, sword in hand, and the detective fired again. With a yell, the man went down across his comrade.

"Quick!" panted Ferrers Locke.

He grasped Bunter by the arm and rushed him away; Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry following fast.

But the alarm was given now; the two shots, ringing through the silence of the night, had awakened the whole crowded inn.

Men leaped up from sleeping-mats, shouting and calling; shadowy figures moved to and fro, from the direction of the "Number One" building the hoarse voice of Chong could be heard shouting.

The flare of a lighted torch blazed through the shadows; doors opened the whole length of the row of rooms; awakened animals in the stables murmured and snarled. Cries rang on all sides; some asking if it was an attack of bandits; others, if the soldiers had come. In the midst of the noise and confusion Ferrers Locke and the three juniors sped away towards the corner of the courtyard, which Hung, rooting about among the garbage, had already examined and found to be accessible to a chamber.

A shadowy figure started up in their path, and a bare sword flashed; but the man went down under the butt of the automatic and lay groaning. Locke ran on, dragging the gasping Bunter.

Torch after torch flared out in blast and smoke, lighting up the courtyard.

"Quick!"

Ferrers Locke, grasping Bunter, swung him up to the wall. The Owl of the Remove grasped the top with his fat hands and hung on. Shouts and yells rang like pandemonium; above them the screaming, enraged voice of Chong, who had now discovered that the prisoners were missing from their cell.

"Owl! Help!" gasped Bunter, clinging desperately to the wall, unable to draw himself up. "I say, you fellows, help!"

A shove from below sent him almost toppling over. Wharton and Bob Cherry had reached the wall. In the angle of the corner broken brickwork made the climb easy enough to active fellows. They scrambled up, and were over the wall almost in a twinkling.

They dropped outside in the open ground that lay between the inn-front and the road. There was a bump and a gasp as Billy Bunter dropped beside them. Over the wall rose the face of Ferrers Locke, last to leave. But even as the disguised detective was clambering over he stopped suddenly, and, under his yellow paint, his face whitened with rage and disappointment.

For in the road there was a glare of torches, a trampling of hoofs, a trample of men. The three Greyfriars juniors, in amazement and despair, found themselves surrounded by armed men; and a voice they knew—the voice of the Mandarin Tang Wang—was crying in Chinese to his men to seize them. In the very moment of escape their enemy had arrived.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

In the Hands of the Mandarin!

TANG WANG, mandarin and descendant of the Mings, sat in his horse-litter, a cold, cruel smile on his yellow-ivory face.

Round him were a crowd of his followers, horse and foot. In his own province the mandarin travelled in state.

Wharton and Bob Cherry, hardly knowing what had happened in the wild confusion, stood gasping in the hands of Chinese soldiers at the side of the mandarin's litter. Billy Bunter, his fat knees knocking together, was only kept from collapsing by the grasp of a Chinese soldier on his collar.

At a little distance from the top of the wall the yellow, wrinkled face of Hung, the beggar-man, stared on the scene. No one cast a glance, or at least a second glance, at the tattered beggar. There were other Chinese on the wall, staring over into the road where the mandarin's cortege had halted. Hung was one among many. But under his tattered gown Hung's hand grasped the automatic, and his eyes were burning at the mandarin. But Ferrers Locke waited.

The untimely arrival of the mandarin had ruined all. The escaping juniors had fallen fairly into the hands of his soldiers. But Ferrers Locke was unknown, unsuspected; he had only to keep silent to escape detection or suspicion. To rescue the juniors now was impossible, but there would be—there should be—a chance later. Only if the mandarin ordered death for them, Locke was prepared to throw prudence to the winds, leap into the midst of the swarming Chinese, and send a bullet through the black heart of the descendant of the Mings.

But it was not a sentence of death that was in the mandarin's thoughts. He smiled as he gazed on the breathless, gasping juniors. From the gateway of the inn, wide open now, came a swarm of curious Chinese to stare on the scene, among them Chong Lo and his men. And Chong approached the mandarin's litter in fear and trembling. His prisoners had escaped. It was only the arrival of the mandarin that had prevented them from getting clear away. And Chong trembled.

"Honourable young ones"—the mandarin's tone was mocking, as he spoke in easy English—"you would have departed. You disdained to look upon my poor city of Pan-shan."

"You've got us!" grunted Bob Cherry.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, it's all up with us! Oh crikey!"

"Keep a stiff upper lip!" muttered Wharton.

"Oh dear! Ow!" Bunter's upper lip was not very stiff. The cold cruelty in the slanting eyes of Tang Wang made his blood run cold.

The mandarin made a gesture, and the prisoners were drawn aside. He

POCKET WALLET

for
YORKS CHUM!

For the snappy Greyfriars Kimerick set out below, John Duncan Phillips, of 18, Nares Street, Scarborough, Yorks, has been awarded one of this week's MAGNET pocket wallets.

That very old martinet, Popper,
With his crop dealt Smithy a
whopper.

Yelled the latter: "Yaroo! I
But I'll soon settle you!"
And he beached in his beautiful
topper!

Have you sent in your effort
yet, chum? If not, set to and
try to win one of these splendid
pocket wallets!

made a sign to Chong Lo to step forward.

The scarred tong-man kow-towed to the earth under the cold stare of his master's cruel eyes. The soldiers looked on him grimly. The torch-bearers, who had lighted the mandarin's way along the road, stood back, their torches casting a ruddy light on the scene. Chong, as he knelt, was shaking from head to foot.

The mandarin spoke in Chinese in a soft voice, like the purr of a tiger. In his tones the wretched Chong heard his fate.

"Is this how you serve the Red Dragon? A day since you should have delivered the prisoners into my yamen at Pan-shan. Did you think that there were none to tell me that they escaped you in the hills of Kwang-tung? This I might have pardoned, for they came again into your hands, and it was only delay. But had I not set out to meet you on the road, and to take from you the prisoners you failed to guard, these white devils would have escaped a second time. Did I not see them with my own eyes dropping from the wall, in the light of my torch-bearers?"

Chong Lo made no sound. Only his eyes were turned up towards the merciless face of the mandarin in a dumb plea for mercy.

But there was no mercy in the heart of the chief of the Red Dragon tong.

"You have failed, O unfaithful servant of the tong," said Tang Wang. "The Red Dragon has no use for such bunglers!"

He signed to a soldier, and the man stepped forward, with a bare, curved sword in his hand.

The keen blade gleamed in the torch-light as it rose, and it descended like a flash of light, and in an instant the decapitated head of Chong Lo rolled under the mandarin's litter.

The Greyfriars juniors turned their faces away, sick at heart. This was the man into whose power they had fallen!

At a sign from Tang Wang they were brought towards the litter again, keeping their eyes turned away from the body of Chong Lo. And again the disguised detective, among the Chinese staring over the inn-wall, grasped the automatic under his tattered gown. Little did the mandarin dream how near death was to him at that moment, or how his own life hung on those of the Greyfriars juniors.

"You will travel with me to Pan-shan," he said. "You will be my guests in my poor yamen. And two great lord Ferrers Locke, who fears neither man nor evil spirit, will seek you there. For he will know that you are in my hands, and he will seek you in Pan-shan. Is it not so?"

The juniors did not answer.

The mandarin's words told them that he had not the remotest suspicion that the Baker Street detective was anywhere near at hand. Yet they knew that the words, as he uttered them, fell on the ears of Ferrers Locke.

"Is it not so?" repeated the mandarin. "Yes, I think it is so! And for that reason, honourable young ones, your heads remain on your shoulders for a season. For the rich merchant, Wun Chung Lung, shall pay great ransoms for you, and the white devil, Ferrers Locke, shall seek you and find torture and death, and then your heads shall be struck from your shoulders and set up on poles before my yamen as a sign."

He snapped an order in Chinese, and the juniors were taken away. They were lifted on the backs of asses, and bound fast to the animals, and their arms bound behind their backs. The three donkeys were roped together, and a soldier took the end of the rope to lead them.

But there was hope in the hearts of the prisoners—a hope that Tang Wang could not know or guess. They knew that, as they journeyed under the stars to Pan-shan, Hung, the beggar-man, was following behind.

Under the stars, piling towards the dawn, the cavalcade swung away westward, deeper and deeper into mysterious China; soldiers riding before the mandarin's horse-litter; soldiers riding behind; torch-bearers lighting the way; and in the midst of the soldiers, the three bound prisoners, watched and guarded on all sides. And in the darkness behind, a tattered and wrinkled beggar man kept the flare of the torches in sight, and hope was kept alive in the hearts of the prisoners by the knowledge that Ferrers Locke was not far from them.

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss the next exciting yarn in this great adventure series. It's entitled: "THE CITY OF DEATH!" You'll enjoy every line of it.)

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OPENING CHAPTERS OF A BRILLIANT NEW SERIAL STORY:—

UP, THE ROVERS!

By
JOHN BREARLEY.

Get started on this roaring yarn by an old favourite; you'll find it abounds in thrills, mystery and tough adventure.



"Take off that mask, you forging dog—I know you!"

A Fatal Punch!

STANDING rigid against the wall beside his desk, James Brennan waited, staring across the darkened room with deadly patience.

Very gently the french window opened, bringing in a gust of storm-heated air, and a man, whose face was hidden by a soft hat and the upturned collar of a raincoat, stepped, light as a feather, into the room, an electric torch in his hand.

A third crackle of lightning, splitting the darkness, threw the garden trees into theatrical relief, and plainly lit the intruder's furtive figure.

The grim smile on Brennan's face vanished; his eyes gleamed with the bitter frost of a man who, knowing he is defeated, yet means to drag his conqueror down into the mire before the end. Not a muscle of his big body moved as a white disc from the visitor's torch shot out and danced quickly round the study.

The searching light leapt swiftly from point to point, shining on chairs, dark corners, and finally the old desk. There it wavered uncertainly; then, quick as a flash, turned fully on the owner of the Rover.

"Ha!"

For a second neither man moved until, shutting off his torch, the intruder slid sideways on lightning toes, crouching, his other hand diving to his coat pocket.

James Brennan turned on the light. "You, is it?" he asked contemptuously. "I thought it was; in fact, I

almost expected you. Take off your mask, you forging dog! Do you think I don't know you!"

A snarl was the only answer, and the drawn gun menaced him hatefully. That the man behind it was painfully rattled was only too obvious; his thin lips worked savagely beneath his mask, and his chest rose and fell in startled gasps as he recoiled instinctively.

Headless of the gun, Brennan studied him beneath frowning brows.

"Yes, I expected you; and now I've got you!" He nodded steadily. "There'll be no mercy for you this time, my friend. You must be mad! Surely you must have known if there was any forgery about I should know at once who had done it?"

"Cut that out!" whispered the other sibilantly. "I thought you'd be in bed. But you seem to know what I've come for. Hand it over—curse you!"

James Brennan sneered at him.

"So, I suppose you found out I had the cheque back from the bank to-day when I sent for my pass-book—and you've come to destroy the evidence, have you? Been watching me all day, I suppose, eh? Well, supposing you'd got it?" he jeered as the gunman winced. "Or supposing I hand it over now and watch you burn it? Why, you clumsy bungler, the moment I saw the cheque I knew it was a forgery, and I knew whose work it was. I intended calling in the police first thing in the morning. I still intend to do so—now!"

The gun rose slowly as its owner's eyes narrowed to slits. During

Brennan's cutting speech the man had made a tremendous effort to recover his poise, and now a dangerously venomous smile showed beneath the edge of the mask.

It was a long moment before he replied.

"Yes, you've got me all right," he agreed softly. "I knew you'd got the cheque back, as you say—and I reckoned on getting in here to-night and burning it. You could have yapped to the police as much as you liked, but you'd have had precious little evidence to back your charge with, wouldn't you?"

His voice took on a steely note.

"But now you've caught me there may be no 'morning' for you, after all!" he hinted.

The threat in his words was obvious; but James Brennan only laughed at him again.

"You fool—you and your popgun! Shoot and be hanged!"

With ominous calm, he stepped away from the wall and took two slow steps towards his crouching enemy.

"Listen!" he rapped out. "I'll tell you something that only I and my doctor know in the world. My heart's rotten to the core. If I last out this football season that'll be all. So carry on—shoot!"

The man was silent, studying him closely.

"Nervous?" taunted Brennan. "Well, I'll tell you something else. The cheque you forged—that is going to get you seven years, my friend—is hidden! You won't find it either. So whether I die to-night from your gun, or in a

few months time from my heart, your goose is cooked! I've still got you! And"—for the first time his calmness broke down before the fury seething inside him—"by Heaven, I'll get you—now!"

His great hands came swiftly from his pockets, and he strode forward. A rat-like hatred and fear distorted the other's face.

"Keep back!" he snarled viciously. "You've got me, have you? Then I may as well shoot!"

Yet, despite his ugliness, his eyes flickered, and Brennan, seeing them, knew his nerve was not good enough for murder. He came on, hands crooked.

"Shoot then; I'll finish smiling!" he gibed, and leapt at the man's throat.

He had been right; the nerve was not there. In a second his opponent pocketed the revolver and swayed frantically from beneath those strong hands.

The antagonists faced each other, breathing hard; then Brennan closed again confidently—too confidently. This time the other stood his ground, ducked a terrible blow, and stabbed his right to Brennan's body. Choking, the Rover's owner reeled weakly against the desk, grey in the face.

Leaping back, the man in the rain-coat glared around him. There were no signs of books or papers on the desk or elsewhere. But he had no time for further search then, for the grey-faced man was coming towards him, silently, terribly, and his fingers toyed hungrily with his gun-butt as he backed away.

Brennan had but one thought now, for that first punch had beaten him, and he knew it. He could feel his strength ebbing fast. Frenziedly he grappled and hustled his man by sheer weight towards the door, where a velvet bell-rope hung. The other staggered back helplessly.

"Got you!" croaked Brennan, in sudden awful triumph; and, thrusting back his foe, he groped, with outstretched hand until he found the rope.

The forger, seeing his intention, jumped in, hitting with both hands; but fending him off desperately, the dying man threw back his head and sent a thunderous shout echoing through the quiet house:

"Jim! Jimmy! Help below here!"

He fell, and his hand, tightening on the rope, set up a mad jangle of bells, bells that clanged riotously long after he had slumped unconscious to the floor.

Sounds broke out on the floor above, the thump of startled feet, and the opening and slamming of a door. White-faced and shaking, the crook wasted no time. He wheeled and raced to the french window, threw it open, and hurled himself into the garden just as the study door opened and the hefty, fast-moving figure of Jimmy Brennan in pyjamas dashed in, and nearly tripped across his father's body.

The french window, unfastened, swung inwards on the breeze.

Brennan's Last Words!

SLEEPY and startled though he was, there was no hesitation about young Jimmy.

Bending, he lifted his father with surprising ease on to a settee, and in another second was forcing a stiff dose of brandy between the clenched teeth. Two old people in night attire came hobbling into the room.

"Master Jimmy! What—"

"Another attack, Jeff!" whispered Jimmy coolly over his shoulder. "Blankets please, and a hot-water bottle!"

"Yes, sir!" The old man hurried off obediently while his wife, Brennan's housekeeper, stood by wringing her hands.

"Is—is it bad, Master Jimmy?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes—bad, Jenny. But he's coming round. Quiet!"

The stricken man opened his eyes slowly and stared around with vague mistiness. He could not move, but Jimmy saw he was trying to say something and he bent close.

"Dad!"

"Jimmy—your uncle—"

The lad stood upright, patting him soothingly.

"Right—ho, dad. Don't talk. I'll phone uncle now—he'll be here in five minutes. But Dr. Stanton first!" he muttered as he dived for the phone.

In an agony of impatience he jangled the telephone bell, fuming at the delay as he waited for the sleepy Railton operator to put him through, and then for Dr. Stanton to be called out of bed. He got through at last, switched off and put a call through to his uncle's cottage. There was another nerve-racking delay before he heard Philip Brennan's quiet voice.

"That you, uncle? It's Jimmy. Come at once—I—I think dad's going!"

He heard a gasp at the other end.

"I'll dress and come at once, lad. Don't worry yet!"

Dropping the phone, Jimmy swung back to the settee. His father was unconscious and nothing could be done but wait.

Suddenly the youngster bent forward, eyeing something curiously. Old Jenny, the housekeeper, had torn back the fallen man's clothing from his throat and chest, and to Jimmy's astonishment he saw a dull, red mark, as though from a blow, squarely over his father's fluttering heart. At the same moment, glancing up again puzzled, he noticed for the first time that the french window was flung wide open. For some odd reason, a vague thrill of alarm gripped his own heart.

Frowning, Jimmy rose to his feet making for the window. But before he could reach it, the sound of the doctor's car pounding up the front drive, drove all else from his mind and he turned back to the settee.

To his delight, a feeble finger beckoned to him. He was on his knees in a flash.

"What is it, dad?"

"Jimmy—you there? The man—"

An icy wave poured through Jimmy's limbs. The man! The open window—and the mark of a blow! He leant forward eagerly.

"Yes, dad? Who was he?"

(Last week's instalment briefly retold.)

Inspired by the inclusion in their ranks of Jimmy Brennan, a star inside-right, Railton Rovers—whose past failures have given their genial but masterful owner, James Brennan, Jimmy's father, many sleepless nights—succeed, after a very shaky start, in winning their first match of the season. Realising that something must be done to stop the rot that has set in, James Brennan decides to pay a huge transfer fee for an experienced centre-forward to back Jimmy up. Brennan is examining his bank book in the peace of his study that same night when he makes the startling discovery that he has been robbed to the tune of three thousand pounds. Extracting a photo from a secret safe in the room, Brennan is owing to get even with the young man portrayed thereon, when the french window suddenly clicks and opens. Somebody was breathing in!

(Now read on.)

But James Brennan never answered. The raised finger drooped—fell; and a queer shadow, greyer and paler than the last, crept slowly over his face. Scarcely daring to breathe, Jimmy crouched down and looked at his father for a long time. When, after a ghastly interval the youngster rose to his feet, his lips were quivering, for all his splendid coolness had deserted him at last.

As in a dream he looked round to see Dr. Stanton and his uncle hurry anxiously into the room side by side, while behind them came an alarmed youngster a little older than himself.

Dazed and shocked, it was to him Jimmy spoke first.

"Hallo, Tony!" he muttered vaguely. "Are-aren't you at Cambridge?"

His cousin gripped him tightly by the hand.

"Left there to-day. Got in Railton an hour ago by the last train!" he jerked. "Jimmy—what's up?"

The words, seeming to clear the mists in Jimmy's brain, brought him to a realisation of the moment. Staring at his uncle and at Dr. Stanton already on his knees beside the settee, he nodded towards his father and shook his head.

"I'm sorry. You're too late!" he said quietly. "Dad's dead!"

A Bombshell!

MANSLAUGHTER? Man-slaughter, my foot! My dad was murdered—murdered, I tell you!

Violently, his cheery, freckled face white and hard, Jimmy Brennan hurled the words at the little group of men around him and glared from one to the other with bitter eyes. A week had passed since the death of James Brennan, and the long inquest on his body was over at last. In the courtyard the officials and chief witnesses had gathered round the furious boy for a last few words of sympathy. One of them, a tall, kindly police inspector, darted a meaning glance at Philip Brennan beside him, and laid his hand on the youngster's heaving shoulder.

"Back up, Jimmy. I know you feel bad, but there's your uncle here to—"

A passionate gesture silenced him abruptly. Jimmy's finger stabbed into his unformed chest.

"Murdered!" the lad repeated. "And you know it, sir. Dr. Stanton told the court that the blow over dad's heart hastened his death; and you and your detectives found signs of a scuffle in dad's study. Why, dash it, he was about to describe the man to me when—he died!"

He gulped and his voice took a deeper, harsher note as he went on.

"A burglar broke into dad's study. Dad, disturbed him and they fought. The burglar hit him over the heart and that killed him. Yet the coroner brings it in 'Manslaughter.' Why?"

The whole group shuffled uneasily and were silent until one of them, Henry Sylvester, Railton's leading solicitor, slipped his hand through Jimmy's arm and turned him round gently. He had been James Brennan's lawyer for very many years, and like most people in Railton, had known young Jimmy since boyhood.

His usually cold, shrewd face wore an unwanted cloud of sadness as he answered:

"Don't blame the coroner, Jimmy, he had no option. Dr. Stanton told us
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how your father died, it is true; but he told us, too, that his heart was so bad he might have collapsed any day. The coroner had to return a verdict of manslaughter after that, you see, because ordinarily the burglar's blow would not have proved fatal."

"But—" struck in the inspector sharply, "there's this, Jimmy. We've little to go on, but we'll find your father's assailant somehow. And then, if by some chance we find that he knew your dad's heart disease—and several folk in Railton have guessed at it for some time—and struck him there on purpose, coroner's verdict or not, that man will hang!"

Jimmy was silent. The events of the past week, merging into one long-drawn nightmare, had left their mark on him, hardening his eyes and stamping his mouth with grim, grim lines. For the time being, a cold, murderous fury overmastered his sorrow, and his hard muscles tingled with the desire to do mischief to someone. Common sense coming to his rescue at last, he relaxed. He sent one smouldering look around the circle, and turned away, his uncle and Tony closing round him in sympathetic silence.

Watching him go, the inspector and several others shook their heads resignedly. Before the three had reached the gate, however, Henry Sylvester spoke again.

"Mr. Brennan!"

Philip Brennan halted, glancing back over his shoulder. The solicitor's face had lost its sadness, and relapsed into its usual professional mask.

"I am sorry, but it will be necessary for you all to attend my office this afternoon!" he said curtly. "There is Mr. Brennan's will to be read—and other matters to be dealt with promptly. May I ask you to bring Jimmy along about two-thirty?"

Philip Brennan stared resentfully for a second, but presently nodded.

"We'll be there," he said shortly, and strode after the two boys.

At sight of Jimmy's face outside in the street, Philip Brennan managed to force a smile.

"Now then, boys," he said gently. "It's been a vile morning. Let's get home for a quiet lunch. Take his other arm, Tony!"

Tony did so promptly, throwing an elegant arm round Jimmy's shoulder. It was characteristic of him that, though he was in full mourning, his black suit was cut in the very latest fashion, and as usual, only a certain

lazy recklessness in his handsome, sun-tanned face saved him from looking a lop.

When Tony had first come to England, Jimmy had viewed his cousin's stylish clothes with uneasy amusement, for Railton was a placid manufacturing town where men and boys dressed soberly. Before long, however, he had discovered that the young South African's dandyism was a harmless—if expensive—pose. Actually he was as hard as nails, and the muscles under those immaculate clothes were as tough and elastic as Jimmy's own.

Then, too, he was as slapdash in his ways as the day was long. Although it was a week since he had arrived home in Railton, he had given no explanation for leaving Cambridge beyond a brief remark that he had been "turfed out for a time." Jimmy, knowing him, guessed he had been mixed up in some madcap scrape or other, and sent home for a while. But he had too many sad thoughts on his mind to ask questions; while good-natured Philip Brennan had contented himself apparently with a brief lecture and a command that Tony should swot at home, letting it go at that.

During the lunch in their little cottage both did their best to cheer Jimmy up, so that outwardly some of the grief and fire had died down when all three were shown later into Henry Sylvester's quiet office in the High Street. Not all of it, though. He threw himself inevitably into a leather chair and watched, with thinly-veiled impatience while the solicitor shuffled a pile of documents before him with calm, practised hands.

An awkward silence fell, broken only by the faint hum of the traffic in the street below. Then Sylvester spoke; his voice cold and precise as ever.

"It is not necessary, I think, to make further reference to the painful happenings of the past week—yet," he began quietly. "My first duty is to read Mr. Brennan's will!"

Adjusting his pince-nez exactly, he commenced to read the first document, the legal phrases making Jimmy clench his fists and exchange a disgusted scowl with Tony. Somehow this callous discussion of his father's goods seemed all wrong, but Sylvester came to an end at last, and it was found, as everyone expected, that James Brennan had left all his property, including the Firs, and Railton Rovers Football Club to his son. There was a few family pictures and antiques for Philip Brennan, and a handsome gold watch for Tony. A deep

sigh of relief went up when the lawyer's dry tones ceased at last.

Leaning back in his chair, Sylvester placed his finger tips together and looked gravely across at Jimmy.

"That has all been quite plain, I trust?" he asked. "You are now the owner of the Firs, and the football club and ground, James!"

Jimmy nodded dumbly. The lawyer went on:

"May I ask what you intend to do with the club?"

At that odd question Jimmy stirred and looked up in slight surprise.

"Do with it, sir? Why, carry on, of course!"

"Are you?" Sylvester's face had a curious intent look on it. "What with?"

The question was sharp; so sharp that everyone sat up abruptly.

Jimmy knitted his brows.

"I—don't think I understand, Mr. Sylvester. What do you—?"

"I mean what money have you to carry on a professional club? I understood from your father that a certain large sum would be necessary before the club could be sure of a successful season!"

"Yes!" agreed Jimmy slowly.

"That's so. Dad is—was—going to get Cowan, of Oldham Athletic, for our new centre-forward. We need one badly!"

Sylvester nodded.

"Quite so! And now?"

"Why, I shall get him, of course!" replied Jimmy promptly. "That was dad's wish, and it's good enough for me!"

"I see. And what will be Cowan's—er—transfer fee?"

Unable to see the force of these questions yet, Jimmy frowned for a moment.

"Between two and three thousand, dad said. Perhaps more!"

Sylvester's mouth tightened.

"Well? Have you got that money?" he asked quickly.

"Of course I haven't!" exploded Jimmy indignantly. "But there's the money dad left in the bank, of course! There it is, isn't there?"

To his utter alarm and bewilderment Sylvester's face became fiercer and harder.

"No, my lad, there is not!" he answered crisply.

(It's a great shock indeed for young Jimmy, but there's a greater and even more overwhelming one ahead for him. Make sure of reading next week's gripping instalment by ordering your MAGNET early!)

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INTRODUCTION DESIRED?
I should very much like to introduce Bill, my brindled bull-dog, to the young gentleman who raided my orchard last week, if he will be so kind as to favour me with a call. **FARMER HALLOWS.**

October 25th, 1930.

Shooting Boots Needed

One-Stop Schoolboy

non-stop dancing, walking, typing and what-not, some might imagine that a school like Groytman's lagged behind the times a bit. But does it? Not on your life, but! The non-stop races to finish full swing in this historic school foundation and several world-class championships have already been secured.

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Dutton's non-stop record in listening to his right through the performance was described by a



except as even more formidable.
(The expert in question, by the way, was not aware that Dutton is stone dead.)

When then achieved immortal fame by walking up and down the Kemoye passage on his hands from tea-time till bed-time. In the process he developed so many corns on his fingers that he had to write with his feet; but his record will take some beating.

Nevertheless most challenged the world to a sleeping contest and hasn't opened his eyes since. Nobody seriously thinks his feet will be challenged.

But the prize, if any, will undoubtedly have to go to blunder. Discovering a couple of drunks during Maury's non-stop snooze, his raving and guffa young

NOTISS

Who will have the nerve to say that Geoffrey's legs behind the knees after that?